

COMRADES IN ARMS

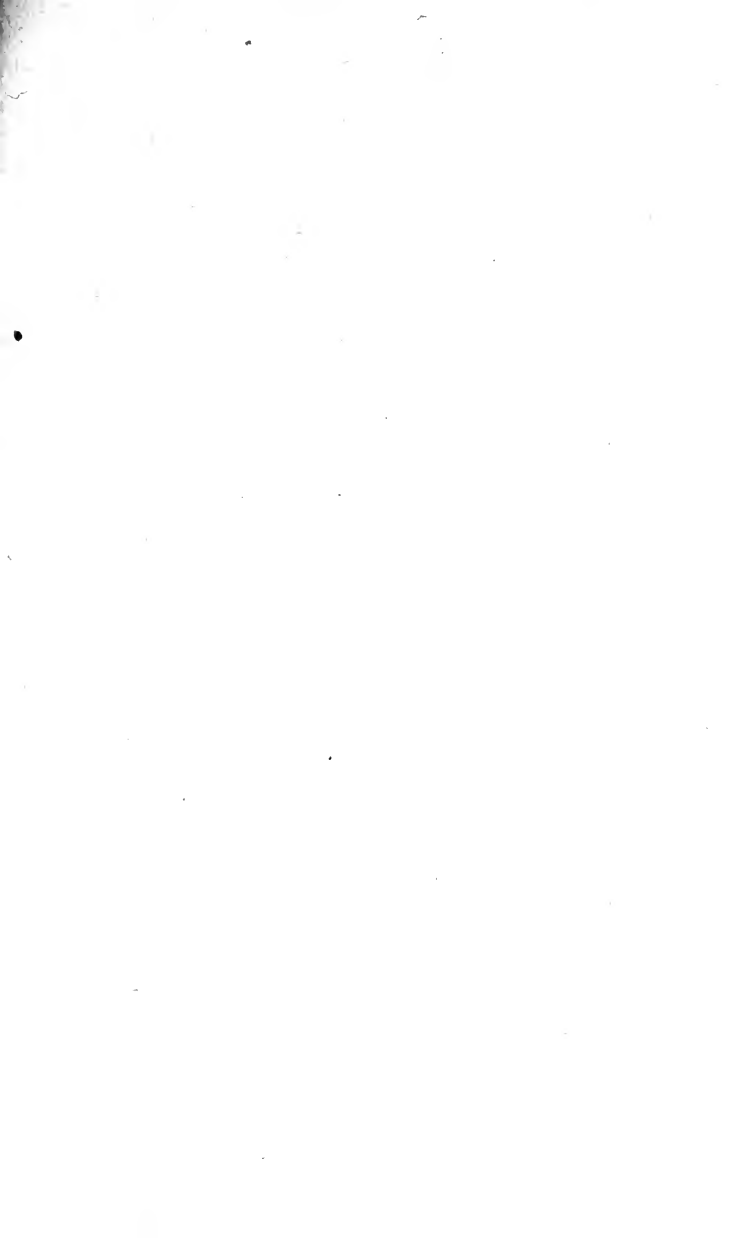
CAPT PHILIPPE MILLET

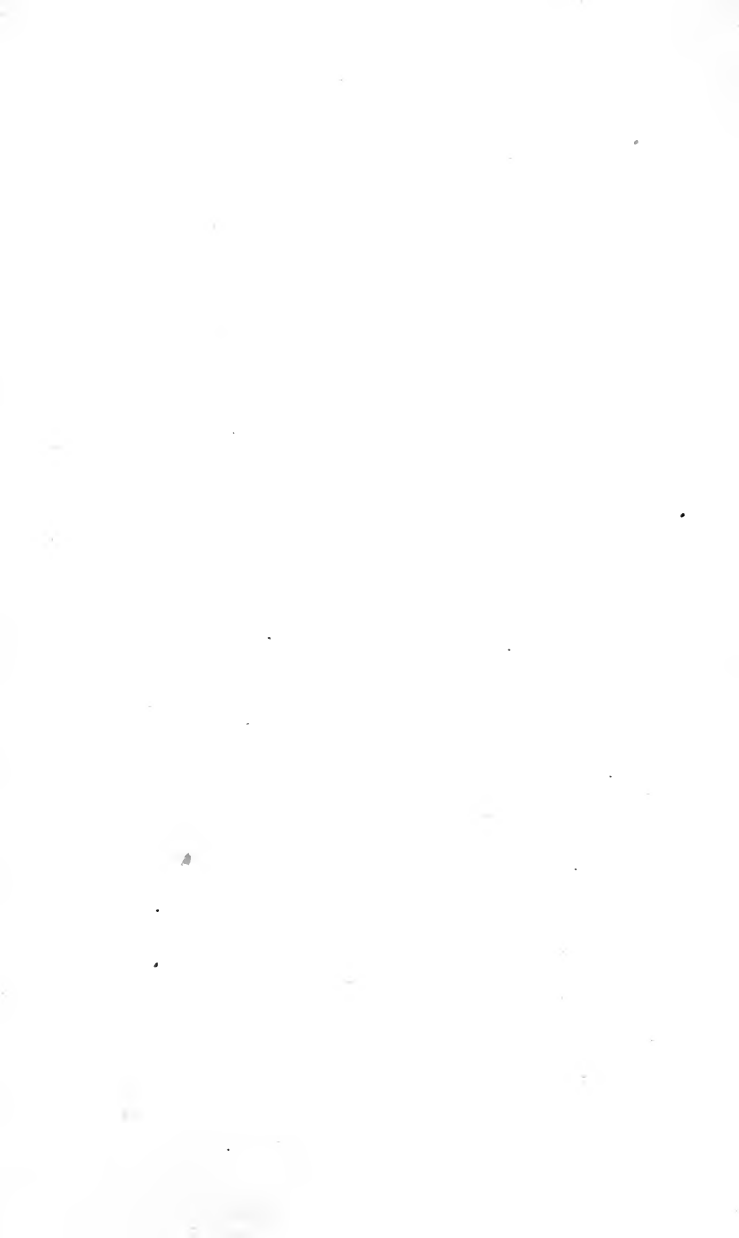
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COMRADES IN ARMS

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COMRADES IN ARMS

BY
CAPTAIN PHILIPPE MILLET

TRANSLATED BY LADY FRAZER

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
J. ST. LOE STRACHEY



HODDER AND STOUGHTON

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INTRODUCTION

WHEN I say that it is an honour to introduce Captain Phillippe Millet's book to the British reading public, I mean it in no mere complimentary or conventional sense. Captain Millet is an interpreter of the British Army, officers and men alike, of unsurpassed merit. He not only understands and loves our soldiers, but by a happy chance he can make others know what he knows, feel what he feels. He has the sympathy of comprehension as well as the sympathy of approbation, and he has the quality of expression. Yet even all these gifts would not have been enough to accomplish the task he set himself, unless he had also been endowed with the power of giving vitality to his writing. This last best gift is his, and therefore his book goes home to the hearts

as well as the heads of his readers. He has himself got a clear mental picture of the British fighting man, and he lets us share that picture. Captain Millet makes no pretence at great literary finesse, but his book is all the better for that. There are no metaphysical subtleties, no straining to find the unfindable, none of the proverbial seeking in the dark room for the black cat which is not there. It is a plain story which he has to tell, but it is lightened throughout by the lamp of humour, and a very English type of humour.

There are two more reasons why the author of *Comrades in Arms* has made so satisfactory a book. In the first place, he did not make the acquaintance of the British Army for the first time on the battlefields of Picardy or Flanders, but knew it well before. Next, and this is really perhaps the most important of all, he knows the British people at home as well as the British Army abroad. He knows, that is,

the land out of which the old army and the new army grew. Therefore he can see us in true perspective. And now I can hear Captain Millet saying that in spite of my rather long-winded exposition of his qualifications, I have left out one thing, and that is that he loves our army and our nation only second to his own. True : and that of course in the last resort is why he is able to be just to us, for justice, as Pater so finely said, is a higher knowledge through love. However, one must not grow sentimental about so sane and soldierly a book as *Comrades in Arms*. I shall therefore hold myself in check and play the reticent Englishman, though, as Captain Millet himself points out in his book, the reticent Englishman, if he ever existed—which may be doubted—is becoming very much of a myth just now. But whether we are what the conventional Frenchman supposes us, glum and dumb, or as Captain Millet reads us, cheerful and talkative, we shall all be one in feeling deeply

touched at the spirit of his book. Here at any rate is a man who does not misunderstand us, and that is what every human being really wants for himself and his work.

The way in which Captain Millet came to know us is very simple. He was appointed in his capacity of a military writer on the *Temps* to come over here and attend our manœuvres. My own acquaintance with him began in that way. I happened to be spending a few days of delightful holiday with a Yeomanry Brigade on Salisbury Plain, accompanied by a tent and two good ponies. On the first night in camp I was unpacking my kitbag, if I remember rightly, with the aid of a Hampshire Yeoman, and getting ready for mess. At the moment of highest pressure there appeared in the door of the tent a very lightly attired figure of a tall man, who was asking for the loan of candle, or a looking-glass, or some one or other of the indispensables which are so apt to be missed by even the very oldest campaigners. The man with

the khaki shirt and the bare legs was Philippe Millet, and we have been friends ever since. As a Somersetshire man, I remember being as much delighted as amused by a question which he put to me early in our acquaintance, "What is the name of this regiment which rolls its 'r's'?" It was a great chance for me, as a Somersetshire man with passionate theories as to the Somersetshire dialect and accent, and as to the aspirated "r" being due to a Celtic admixture; I took full advantage of it and of poor Millet's defenceless condition. It is wonderful to think that these same North Somerset Yeomen stood in the trenches at the First Battle of Ypres, an attenuated line of half-trained town and country lads, to meet the Prussian Guard, and repulsed them and overthrew them. Though officers' servants, cooks, despatch riders, and every man that could be swept together, was in the fighting line, and there was literally nothing behind, the North Somersets held on till victory was theirs. When the Kaiser's

Guardsmen swarmed over No Man's Land and ran up and down along the parapet, all seemed lost. Yet, as a Yeoman who was there put it to me, "We felt we were done, but somehow or other they couldn't make up their minds to jump into the trench, and after a little they all went back." I could only say, or rather, think, "*Deus nobis haec otia fecit.*" War has its miracles as well as peace.

In three or four days spent in riding over the Wiltshire downs with Philippe Millet I learnt what an unselfish and loyal friend he was to England, and how well he understood the way in which military and political affairs have, or I should say, had, before the war, to be approached in this country.

I feel I am making rather too long a stand between the reader and the enjoyment which he is certainly going to get out of *Comrades in Arms*. I should, however, like to resume here something of what I have already said, in writing on the French

version of his book in *The Spectator*, as to its general characteristics.

Nothing could possibly be more sympathetic than his attitude towards the British type of mind and character. He sees our weaknesses, and his sense of humour is stirred by many of our eccentricities, but never in an unkindly spirit. He is very kind to our virtues, and more than a little blind to our faults. His series of studies will be of great use in explaining to his countrymen the peculiarities of the English, and in dispelling that mist of convention and tradition which too often keeps Englishmen and Frenchmen apart. For that reason I shall wish his book a large circulation in France. It deserves an equally large one in England, on grounds of literary charm and readability. I say without hesitation that any one who reads them will find genuine delight in these idylls of the fray, for that is what these short studies really are—little pictures or vignettes from the trenches, the artillery zone, or behind

the lines. Happily, too, the author has not rigidly confined us to the British Army. The occasional studies of French soldiers and French peasants are exceedingly good, and make us wish for more.

Before I say anything in detail as to the actual contents of Captain Millet's volume I may comment upon the really remarkable precision with which he handles English slang and vernacular talk, whether of officers or privates. It is so very easy for a foreigner to go wrong in such details. Even English writers often get their atmosphere wrong, and put into the mouths of generals words which would never be spoken except by subalterns, and vice versa; or again, attribute to men of forty-five slang of an epoch a quarter of a century later than the period at which they must have acquired their own *argot*. The only slip that I can find in this respect, and I am not absolutely sure that it is a slip (the problem is one of no little interest in the study of language), is where Captain Millet

makes the General of a Division speak of the Germans as "blighters." All depends, of course, upon the age of the general. If he had reached that rank before the war, and so was presumably a man of fifty-two to fifty-six, I should say unhesitatingly that he was not likely to use the word "blighters." "Blighter," if I remember rightly, made its bow for general acceptance on the introduction of Mr. Kipling. The men, therefore, who would, as it were, have grown up with "blighter" would be the subalterns, captains and majors. But, after all, these are the days of very young generals, and Captain Millet might easily defend himself by saying that his Divisional General was under forty. To counter that, however, I should say that in the particular study, "Un Général Anglais," where the phrase under discussion occurs, the context points to a general of wide experience well over fifty.

People who once begin to read *Comrades in Arms* are not likely to stop until they

have read it from cover to cover. If, however, we can imagine a man with only time to read one or two things in the book, he must not fail after reading "The English General," to study "Harold," "After Neuve-Chapelle," and "The Pleasant Billet."

Before I leave the subject of Captain Millet's fascinating work, a word must be said as to his war record. It will help readers to understand many of the little touches in the book. He started the war as a lieutenant and machine-gun officer in the 11th Battalion of the 4th Regiment of Zouaves, of Tunis. He was wounded at Charleroi in August 1914. He was on sick leave in Marseilles when the Indian troops arrived there in September 1914. The General commanding the Lahore Division asked that he should be attached to the division as liaison officer. He left with them for the front in October, and remained with the Lahore Division as late as July 1915. In this capacity he was with the Indians at the Battles of Givenchy, Neuve-Chapelle, and Ypres, and was in the

push in May, when he was used as liaison officer between the Lahore Division and the 7th British Division, then under General Gough. In July 1915 he was attached to the 1st Indian Cavalry Division, and became for three months what the French call "un immortel." Cavalry soldiers are supposed never to die. In November 1915 he left the British Expeditionary Force, and was attached to a French Infantry Division. At the beginning of January 1916 he was recalled from the front by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and put in charge of the British Department of the Maison de la Presse. Captain Millet was mentioned in despatches by Sir John French after the Second Battle of Ypres, April-May 1915, in which he did liaison work between the Lahore Division and the 152nd French Division, and received the French War Cross for this piece of work. He also received our Military Cross from Prince Arthur of Connaught on December 25th last, in front of the troops at the Headquarters of the

French Army. He was promoted to the rank of Captain in March 1915.

I am 'not going to do what I know Captain Millet would resent, flatter him to his face, but I feel I must say that any one who has the requisite knowledge will realise at once that this is a very fine war record, and one of which Captain Millet's friends may well be proud. He has many friends already in this country, but I venture to predict that he will have a very great many more after his book comes into the hands of the larger British public.

A word may be said as to Lady Frazer's translation. She has done her work exceedingly well. It is spirited, which, after all, is the best thing one can say of a translation.

J. St. LOE STRACHEY.

THE SPECTATOR OFFICE,
1, WELLINGTON ST.,
STRAND, W.C.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THE following notes were made during the war. For a period of several months, in my capacity of liaison-officer attached to a British division, I was in a position to see the soldiers of the British Empire and of France fighting side by side. From this moving multitude certain figures, grave or gay by turns, stood out in relief day by day. To my eyes they summed up, better than an abstract analysis, the distinctive features of the two nations in arms. I have here attempted to bring them together just as they were in reality under the skies of Flanders, and as the same men, or their like, stand shoulder to shoulder once more on both banks of the Somme.

JULY, 1916.

P. M.



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COMRADES IN ARMS

I

LE MONT DES CATS

November 1914.

A STEEP path, like a river of yellow mud, climbs through the meadows to the monastery. Two weeks ago two English officers fell on this path. The Prince of Hesse's horsemen, in ambush at the top of the hill, had killed the first, a captain, the moment he debouched at the head of a patrol, whereupon the second, a boy of twenty, running forward to pick up his chief, fell beside him. They rest now in the soft earth, not far from a grave where some German bodies have been buried pell-mell. For their death was avenged the

same evening. The Prince of Hesse, mortally wounded, was left by his men at the gate of the monastery, and died a prisoner. A little earth, lately turned over, a few crosses of white wood : these are the only traces of the struggle. The Mont des Cats wears again its customary aspect, and the Trappist fathers tell you the details of the fight unmoved, as if they were dealing with past events.

A dull sound, however, interrupted at moments by a loud report, apparently quite close by, makes you turn your eyes towards the horizon. The Mont des Cats is nothing but a hummock, but, like a belvedere, it overlooks the immense plain of Flanders. Opposite, under a huge cloud which seems to drag on the earth, are seen the belfries of Ypres ; to the right, behind some low ground, Armentières and its factory chimneys ; on the left a town crowded round a church—Poperinghe : in the same direction,

but farther on, torrents of smoke, coming out from the ground, as though from a crater hardly extinct, reveal the position of Dixmude ; while still farther to the left, in a bluish haze from which burst flashes of light, Nieuport can just be distinguished, and the faint white line of dunes beyond. The whole battlefield spreads itself at your feet, as on one of the canvases of the old masters. You marvel at being able to take it all in at a glance. After all, you say to yourself, it is small.

Your field-glass ransacks fields, roads, and outskirts of woods. A yellow ball ascends slowly over Ypres : a captive balloon, no doubt. In the neighbourhood of Poperinghe a hundred or so red trousers in an enclosure—a second yellow ball a few thousand yards from there—and that is all.

Without the smoke of Dixmude, the semicircle of grey flakes hanging in the distance between the clouds and the earth,

and, above all, without the roar of the "heavies," you would fancy yourself in front of a peaceful landscape. But the cannon thunders with furious obstinacy from all sides at once, and the booming is so persistent that you are driven to think of some phenomenon of the natural world, of the subterranean rumbling which precedes great volcanic eruptions. The human individual is nothing but an invisible atom in this kind of cataclysm.

At this very moment frightful scenes are being witnessed between Dixmude and Bixschoote : water is rising in the German trenches, men are being drowned by hundreds, and all along the line brave Frenchmen and brave Englishmen are dying every minute while clinging to the reconquered territory. Of all this heroism nothing is apparent. The only palpable realities are the two huge monsters who face and tear one another across the plains ; two collective

masses, who have freed themselves from the conditions of individual existence, to whom sleep is unknown, and whose strength ever destroyed is ever being renewed, and who, like the elements, seem ignorant of pain.

"You ought to see that by night," the innkeeper said to me. "The whole plain looks on fire, and the sky is lit up by flashes."

This inn, standing on the edge of a muddy pond, has been visited by both the hostile armies. The innkeeper's niece, a Flemish girl with fair eyes, had stopped there with the children, and had been obliged to offer hospitality to the Germans for five days.

"They didn't do me any harm," she said calmly. "I was lucky. But what brutes they are! When they came in to ask for water they looked as if they would like to kill me. However, I attended to them as well as I could. One evening I stood here

by my stove from four to half-past nine making coffee for them. I hadn't dared eat anything all day, nor the children either ; besides, when they saw us with a crust of bread in our hands they took it from us to make bread-and-butter. I couldn't stand it any longer, I was worn out. At ten o'clock some soldiers came in, and, not content with taking everything, they opened my drawers and carried off my money. I confess I couldn't bear it, I began to weep."

The German officers left an equally unpleasant impression. One of them, quite young, was insolent in all he said. When, in obedience to some peremptory order, she fetched a new bottle of brandy from the cellar, he accused her roughly of giving him vinegar.

"He was a bad man, sir ; yes, bad ! The others were scarcely any better. The first thing they did was to open the cupboard

where we keep our tobacco and give out cigars and cigarettes to their men. The Prince of Hesse, who was killed the evening of his arrival, was one of them. He lunched here and never gave me a sou."

Her eyes lit up with pleasure, on the contrary, when she told me about the arrival of the English.

"At first I didn't like to open the door. I was hiding in the house, and I was afraid of being shot. But when the Germans had gone away for good I called an English officer to show him a wounded German who had fallen in front of the house, and whom I had dragged into the kitchen. It was then that the English came in. I made them some better coffee than I had made for the others—they were nice to me and to the children, they and their men. They are a different race, you see."

Outside, the bombardment continues

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with the same intensity. The good people in the inn have grown quite used to it, as though to a new order of things come to stay for a long while. They have even given up asking when it will finish.

II

AT THE CROSS-ROADS

November 1914.

A SMALL town in the north. The walls of its principal square, which a fine old belfry of smoke-black bricks dominates, bear marks of bullets. Holes, as if punched out, appear in the windows of a café. These are the last traces of the drama which has been played out within these walls. For the Bavarians had placed the chief citizens of the town, huddled together, in front of their infantry, and two aldermen had lost their lives there—the first having been killed outright, and the second having died from his wounds the day before yesterday. And yet, from what the Vicar said, these same Bavarians had

piously attended Mass ! A little Spahi is on duty at the foot of the belfry. In spite of his turban, his red tunic and baggy blue trousers drooping to his ankles, he looks, so alert is his face, like a French child. The blue cross on his forehead, however, reveals his origin. He is a Berber, a thoroughbred Moroccan, the latest arrival of the Franco-African family, and yet already at his ease in the heart of the West. He speaks a little French, and makes use of it to declare proudly that he is not cold.

As a matter of fact, several regiments of French cavalry are billeted in the town and in its outskirts—dragoons, hussars, and Moroccan Spahis.

It will be known afterwards with what tenacity they barred the way against the enemy. Day after day, attacked by hordes they fired, crouching down in the trenches, like foot-soldiers ; nine hundred of them held for four days a line two thousand yards

long without giving way an inch, and without calling for reinforcements. At the present moment they are resting as calmly as if they were at manœuvres. The Moroccans are the gayest of the gay. They have taken possession of one of the quarters of the town, and walk about with their hands in their pockets and a silk handkerchief round their necks, delighted at being stared at. With their plump faces, prominent cheekbones and short beards, they might be taken for inhabitants of Auvergne—only their look is African.

But suddenly something new comes into sight: some horsemen in khaki ride majestically up the high street, lance in hand, and wearing tall turbans, under which black glossy curls appear, and having their shoulders protected by coats of mail. They are Indian lancers. Their shaggy faces are the colour of tobacco juice, and the look in the eyes is dull and lifeless

One would hardly care to meet them in a gorge of the Himalayas. They are at the head of an Indian brigade. A battalion of Sikhs soon comes in sight. Their turbans are round, like pumpkins, and their beards, curled in Assyrian fashion, seem to be hanging from them. They advance with an elastic step, their rifles on their shoulders. Then come some Pathans, beardless and olive-skinned, with the "kullah" on top of the turban, which, in the distance, produces the effect of a mitre. Regimental wagons, drawn by small mules, bring up the rear, their drivers squatting between the two wheels: a caravan, all complete, has been brought by the powerful genii in the service of the sahibs from the winding streets of Delhi or of Lahore, and transported, all intact, over mountains, rivers and seas.

At the corner of a cross street the Spahis watch these bronzed men pass

with evident astonishment. From where do they come? Who are they? One of the Moroccans, plucking up courage, asks me in broken French if they are Arabs. I do my best to explain to him that they come from India; but it is quite clear that this answer does not satisfy his curiosity. His companions laugh and joke without worrying. The handsome demeanour of the Sikhs delights them; an ally like this is always welcome. Not long ago in their native home they must have received with the same undisguised joy the tribes who came, one after another, to swell the numbers of their tents in order to march under the leadership of a "roghi." But their look grows still keener when I inform one of them that there are some Mussulmen among these Indians. They pass on the good news to each other in Berber. I point out a Pathan. "Moslem," cries a Spahi, stretching out his hand towards him. The Pathan turns round

and smiles. He smiles in silence, however, for the Afghanistani are not very communicative. Still, they have understood one another. No doubt this is the first time that the two branches of Islam, the farthest apart, have met together elsewhere than at Mecca.

Shortly afterwards I find the Indians again in a school, where they are billeted. Under a low grey sky, which hangs heavy over a large muddy courtyard, their drivers are hammering pegs into the ground and attaching their small obedient mules to them by their hind legs.

Some long-haired Sikhs are arranging their affairs in the class-rooms, now minus their desks, which are standing by the wagons in the open air. In a corner of the building, one large school-room remains the property of the Spahis, one of whom in the doorway is trying to enter into conversation with his co-religionists of the Far East.

This is not easy, as Hindustani and Arabic are not much alike, and almost the only word they have in common is the "salaam" of the believers. The Pathans, moreover, continue to prove taciturn, but the Moroccan is not easily abashed. Familiar and enterprising, he catches hold of the Indians by the sleeve, and laughs exuberantly. It reminds one of a Southerner trying to break the ice with an inhabitant of the North. Without doubt his ancestors have not been subjected to the age-long bondage to which the look of an Indian, whether Mussulman or Hindoo, still testifies.

Outside, night is falling on the little wounded town. A street-lamp here and there lights up, at intervals, the pavement, which rings with the clatter of spurs. The chief square is a dark pit, in which the silhouettes of a few lorries, English and French, are outlined. There reigns, however, an extraordinary calm, and, apart from

the distant reports, like the sound of a falling rug, which reveal from time to time the presence of the cannon, you might think you were in some sleepy corner of one of our old provincial cities. The grocer's is still open. The gas in the café, which has been riddled with bullets, has just been lighted for those regular customers who have remained faithful to it. A dog slinks about in search of refuse, as in ordinary times. Legends have vanished, and we are now far from India and Morocco, amongst industrious, peaceful people, for whom existence consists of a series of modest efforts, and who allow themselves to be carried gently down the stream of time.

A loud noise, however, makes you spring up. The windows rattle. Is it an alarm? No; it is merely a stream of heavy lorries crowded together, which debouch on to the square, cross it noisily and disappear into

the darkness. By the light of flares I discover the Senegalese huddled together under some tarpaulins to which they have tied their bags, which look like hams. The most favoured, at the edge of the lorries, signify their contentment as they pass. They feel the same joy as children in letting themselves be carried about in these uncomfortable things, instead of trudging, with their knapsacks on their backs, along the paved streets. Their big ebony-black heads contrast unexpectedly with the infantry coats with which they have been provided to protect them from the cold. They also have come to this curious meeting-place of races, in the rain of the North.

III

THE OVERGROWN CHILD

November 1914.

HE is a good old English colonel with a grey moustache, in no way distinguishable at first sight from the ordinary type shown to us every day by the English illustrated papers : tall, thin, strapping, with a moustache groomed like Kitchener's, an honest look, and features regular and, as it were, regimental. He is so exactly a part of his uniform that he might be said to have been torn straight out of one of those coloured advertisements which, in order to attract recruits, present the different specimens of the English army in their most flattering aspect. But it is the characteristic of an Englishman to conceal the most lively

originality under an often commonplace appearance, and this man is no exception to the rule. It is perceptible directly he walks, as he does with a step which seems to ask to be allowed to cross the desert, and it comes out, above all, when he speaks. He is very talkative, and instead of confining himself to moving his lips, he acts what he says like a Southerner, gesticulating furiously with his arms.

Ever since the beginning of the campaign this old soldier has been unhappy. Affectionate and expansive, he is willing to confide to everybody the cause of his grief. Age and rank, he says, have made him, contrary to his wish, a staff officer, and, in place of accompanying his old regiment, he has had to resign himself to the dictation of reports between four walls. During thirty-five to forty years he has only fought in Egypt or in India against savages. The tune of bullets is familiar to him, but not

the tune of shells. The opportunity of fighting in good earnest at last presented itself, yet there he is, condemned not to hear the cannon except at a distance.

“I understand nothing about these silly papers. Let them put me in the trenches, and they’ll soon see what I can do. . . . To think that I’ve been here for weeks without having so much as *seen* any fighting !”

He goes on in this strain for hours if only he can find an obliging listener, and speaks of tearing out the two ends of red stuff sewn on to his collar which single him out for his own contempt.

The other day, however, unable to stand it any longer, he found the French officer interpreter attached to the divisional staff, and asked him to motor with him “to go and see the shells.”

They set out together along the road leading to the trenches. The colonel was radiant. He was enjoying his holiday.

“Hallo,” said he, “they’re shooting over there. . . . Do you see that white smoke to the right? No doubt that’s a shell. It’s very far off. What do you think—a mile or two? If you don’t mind, let’s go in that direction.”

A few minutes later the motor stopped a hundred yards from some cross-roads. The colonel ran there, followed by the interpreter. It was where he had seen the smoke appear, but all trace of bombardment had vanished, and sitting by the roadside the soldiers were smoking their pipes. The colonel set himself unsuccessfully to find the hole dug by the last projectile. He looked like a hunter who has mistaken the cover.

“No luck,” he repeated, discomfited.

Suddenly a prolonged hissing caused him to turn on his heels. At the same moment an explosion blew away the road fifty yards in front of the cross-ways. The windows

of a neighbouring cottage flew into pieces. Without waiting any longer the Tommies threw themselves down on their stomachs. The interpreter would willingly have imitated them had the colonel not been thinking of something quite different.

“At last there’s one,” he cried.

In two strides the old colonel had already reached the hole, which was now smoking. It was only a 15-centimetre shell, nevertheless the dimensions of the small crater torn open in the road filled him with admiration. He knelt down to look at it more closely, then he stuck his arm in up to the shoulder to measure the depth.

“It’s very curious,” he said, “right at the bottom I can feel a kind of small chimney, but I can’t succeed in touching the fuse of the projectile; it must have penetrated, no doubt, a good way. . . . Where do you think it came from?”

The interpreter was going to put forward

a hypothesis when a fresh detonation almost knocked them both over. The shell this time had just burst twenty yards away, breaking off an enormous branch which dropped down with a creak.

“Very remarkable!” declared the colonel.

He got up with a bound, planted himself in front of the tree and delightedly studied the damage, nose in air. The interpreter was obliged to count with him the gaping wounds which the projectile had torn open in the tree and the hedge. Armed with his knife, the colonel poked about in the bark in the hope of discovering some splinters.

“And where can it have come from?” he asked, raising his eyes.

This problem amused him, and he made some sweeping gestures in order to trace in the sky the curve which the shell must have described. According to him, this crump must have grazed the corner of the cottage.

“A yard more to the left and the house would have been in ruins,” he concluded, with a kind of regret.

“Certainly, certainly,” said the interpreter.

A new twofold explosion made them both jump, then a third which fell behind them on the cross-roads. There was no longer any doubt about it. The enemy had taken the crossing of the two roads as his mark, that is to say, the very place where they were standing. Retreat was forced upon them. So much so, that the chauffeur had not waited for the colonel's orders before turning his vehicle in the direction of headquarters, an initiative which was singularly pleasing to the interpreter. The colonel, however, exclaimed with amazement :

“My word, this fellow is afraid of shells ! What do you think of it ?”

He was anxious to continue his drive.

The motor had to turn half round, but had the good luck to pass the cross-roads without hindrance. They went on again, and from time to time a shell passed over their heads with the sound of a ship's bow cleaving the waves. After a little while the colonel himself stopped the car and walked along the road, with his chest quite unprotected.

"I'm quite right," he said, "there are our trenches over there. Come on ! Don't you see that bank of earth over there, two hundred yards off ? Those are our first-line trenches. Farther on, about five hundred yards, are the German trenches. Our reserve trenches are behind us, do you see ? One gets a good view from here ; the country is flat and bare."

He gesticulated wildly, as though to attract the attention of the German signalmen who were hiding behind their parapets. The interpreter confided to me afterwards that this was one of the most disagreeable

moments that he had ever known. His pride as a Frenchman forbade him showing the slightest sign of fear. But however that might be, an end as senseless as this seemed deplorable to him. By a miraculous chance no bullet hit them while the colonel was giving full vent to his joy. His companion, however, was only able to breathe freely when finally he consented to leave this delightful spot and to take the road again to his prison.

After this day, the old hero often makes his escape and returns within range of the shells. He has even acquired the habit of taking a stroll in the trenches, which he enters usually holding his head erect, as though he were in barracks. The way has become so familiar to him that he no longer has any need of a guide, which is very fortunate for the interpreter. The Germans will certainly kill him in the end, but, anyhow, he will have "seen some fighting."

IV

THE INHABITANTS

November 1914.

THE other day I went up to the top of the church tower. A plain as vast as the sea is seen from up there, in which clumps of trees and belfries are the only landmarks. The battle was then raging on the whole front. Above me aeroplanes were describing huge circuits, and on my left a town some three miles off was evidently being heavily shelled, for every now and then its roofs were capped with thick pads of grey wadding. But the centre of the fight was to be found on my right. An uninterrupted line of whitish tufts above hedges, farms and copses, marked the

meeting-place of shrapnel coming from the German positions and from our batteries, English and French. On both sides of that smoke the shells from the heavy artillery were destroying villages. Right over on the enemy's side a building, either a barn or a dwelling-house, was being devoured by a tongue of flame, which was curling in the middle of a cloud. Now and then a distant flash emerging from a bush revealed the whereabouts of a cannon. Cannon, little and big, thundered without interruption, like machine-guns. Between these two walls of steel, the invisible infantry could be pictured crouching in trenches and in shell-holes, or pinned to the ground. I could picture also the rain of bullets passing with a shriek overhead, or striking the earth or men's bodies with a thud.

Notwithstanding all this, my glasses showed me something else besides. Peasants on the roads and in the fields were

attending to their ordinary work. One group, in which I thought I distinguished some women, was walking slowly, not far from the village in which the principal action was taking place. Farther off still, a man was ploughing fifty yards from a farm, when a greenish smoke ascended suddenly in the yard of this farm. I looked for the man ; he had not even stopped, but continued to drive his team.

All are like that. Do what you will, you cannot separate them from their homes and their plots of land. Strict orders have been given to the civil population to evacuate the zone of fire in the interests of the troops, as much as of the inhabitants, for the spies of the enemy swarm, and the only means of getting rid of them is to forbid civilians, once for all, to go near the trenches or the batteries. Every day gendarmes and soldiers make a clean sweep of them in the villages and farms, and every one is led back to the

rear. But this is waste of time : the next day they are there again.

I have questioned some of them who have got arrested as suspects. Two men, master and servant—the first an old man (all the young men have gone), the second, half-deformed, with his left eye covered with a yellowish film.

“What the devil were you doing by the trenches? Didn't you know that you ran the risk of being killed?”

“We had returned to feed the animals.”

Another day an old woman said to me :

“They told us that the farm was burnt ; and so, you can understand, we wanted to go and see.”

Others in countless numbers come each day and demand passes so as to return home for a few moments to make sure that their house, has not been plundered by soldiers. If we would allow them they would go right into the villages occupied by the

enemy, at the risk of being shot. One morning a woman arrived with her three children, the youngest of whom was not weaned. She wept and begged to be allowed to pass over the four or five miles between her and her own village on foot. "Our books are buried in the garden, and if I leave them there any longer they will rot." This village, mentioned every day in the official communiqués, has been taken and retaken ten times ; not one stone has been left standing on another, and the two armies go on fighting over its ruins like two dogs over a bone. We were forced to deny this poor woman her request ; probably she has not understood why she was refused this consent, which would have sent her to her doom.

For some time I thought that this bravery and this obstinacy might be explained by a total unconsciousness of danger. I was wrong. Another woman, who met with

a similar refusal, lost her temper. "And what," she cried, "if I don't care a bit about bullets and shells?" She is not the only one who talks like this. "After all," they often say to you, "if we have to lose all that we've got, we prefer to die."

One last incident. Yesterday morning another "woman-spy" was brought to us, the mother of an officer of the police. Her house was situated between the first and second line of trenches, at the spot most favoured by projectiles. For eight days her son did his utmost to make her listen to reason. No warning was able to overcome the old woman's obstinacy. She wished to die "at home."

The truth which we all of us begin to see for ourselves is that, however precious life may be, it occupies only the second or third place among the good things of this world. All of those—and for three months they have been numerous—who have seen

death approaching, have felt that it would be a small thing if it weren't for those they leave behind them. For the French peasant there is something else which comes before the inclination to live, and that is his love for the corner of ground which he has rendered fruitful.

V

ON A SCRAP-HEAP

December 1914.

WHENEVER any one asks where the Commandant of Artillery, M., of the French division on our right flank is to be found, the answer is invariably : "The commandant is on his scrap-heap."

One fine morning, unfortunately a little misty, I turn up there. This northern sun is the despair of the gunners, who like to see what they are firing at. The enormous black pyramid, which by the waste products of the mines has been made to grow like a wart on the plain, is bathed in a milky, dirty light, good at most for infantry fire. A rope helps one to climb more easily over the heap of damp coal.

“Isn’t the commandant there?”

How should he not be? For a month he has passed all his time there. Exactly, and here he is, coming out muttering from his commandant’s post, a hole behind the summit, sheltered by sheet iron. This is the hole where he takes refuge when it rains too fast, or when the Germans amuse themselves by firing on the scrap-heap. In this latter case the commandant contents himself with fuming like a busy man who has been disturbed in his work; next he asks if the telephone is working all right.

“The wires have been cut! Very well, then, yell—good heavens! yell;” and the operators, all of them from the South, comply promptly with this order. They can be heard two hundred yards off, shouting through their hands hollowed like a speaking-tube:

“Second, f-fifteen! Third, th-thirty!”

This morning the commandant is not

pleased. His moustache bristles, his face is black, and the colour of his coat shows signs of an already prolonged stay on the coal-heap. But what does his appearance matter to him—he only cares about his work.

“Ah! they imagine that the mist will bother me. Well, they’ll soon see.”

“They” are the people opposite. We are going to attack their trenches to-day. The attack has by this time begun—quick-fire on their “holes,” followed by the spring forward. Things are not going badly, but the enemy’s artillery has become active in its turn, not to mention the machine-guns. These latter are a nightmare to the commandant. Day and night he dreams of locating them in their hiding-places.

Suddenly a volley bursts out down there, in the plain. It issues from a row of mounds just like those in which the peasants of the North plant their beetroots. Two batteries

of seventy-fives have just opened fire by order of the Chief. We are never tired of hearing them. They make us think of the cabman whose client was whipped one day by another cabman, and who took vengeance in the same way on the other's client: "Ah! you whip my bloke, do you? Take that, and that, and that!" But the German seventy-sevens this time undertake to answer. Hissings—shrapnel and high explosives fall three hundred yards in front of the French batteries. The commandant shrugs his shoulders.

"Where the devil do they get their shells made? At farriers' shops. What rubbish! . . . Ah, if I could only knock out their cursed machine-guns!"

Nevertheless his face brightens up an instant. The observing officer has just found the range of the enemy battery. Half a minute later, when a new round from the enemy falls a few yards from the seventy-

fives, these send back a furious volley which this time hits the "cabman" himself.

However, the commandant is hardly ever affected by the fortunes of the fight. He is so used to battles, that standing on his scrap-heap, he looks like a conscientious office hand engaged in mere routine work. Even shells have stopped giving him the slightest shiver, nor does he any longer enjoy the pleasure of having been missed.

From time to time he estimates the cost of the munitions he has just consumed.

"There's eighty pounds' worth—one hundred and sixty pounds' worth."

The officers who surround him seem made on his own pattern. Not one of them allows his attention to be diverted by the incidents which are so appreciated by new-comers : a farm catching fire, a projectile giving out green smoke, a shell passing overhead with the noise of a motor-bus. Wrapped up in their mufflers, with muddy feet and coats

badly buttoned, they perform their work with indifference and precision. The war has created a second nature for them.

By order of the commandant a raking firing is being carried out. A party of the enemy has been silly enough to show itself, and the hail of steel which beats down on it must be causing frightful havoc. A captain, observing the effect of the firing, declares coldly :

“I see, I am rather over the mark.”

At the foot of the scrap-heap from which I have come down, a gunner, atrociously dirty, his cap over his eyes and his tunic half open upon a broad flannel belt, explains to me why he despises the German artillery.

“We’ve been up here now for a month, and they haven’t even managed to discover us. Every day we know beforehand what they’re going to do. First of all, there’s a volley which falls over there near those

workmen's cottages. Then, ten minutes afterwards, a second over here, a little to the right. And then a third, ten minutes afterwards, quite close to us. We've got to mistrust this last one. There was a sergeant who was killed because he didn't take cover when the ten minutes were up, but would lounge about in front of the guns."

With one arm stretched out lazily, he points to the mound.

"When we came there we planted beet-roots ; but if we had known we should have planted some salads. In that way we should have had at least something."

Towards nightfall it was the commandant's turn to come down, stick in hand. He let himself glide down the length of the rope without as much as a look at his feet. This abrupt staircase was as well known to him as the staircase at his own home.

"My day's finished," he said to me.

“I’ve chucked four hundred pounds’ worth at them.”

And he went away to dinner trying to find a new method of “knocking out” their machine-guns.

VI

THE ADVENTURE OF MAJOR TURNBULL, R.E.

December 1914.

THE first time I met Major Turnbull of the Royal Engineers, I really thought he was tipsy. The look in his eyes seemed to me bright but undecided, his movements hesitating. The words escaped with difficulty from his lips ; you would have said that he was first of all setting himself to keep them back, then that he was letting them suddenly go staggering away. The fragment of each sentence was moreover interlarded with an oath proscribed by English propriety, the contracted form of which does no more than vaguely recall the "by Our Lady" of Shakespeare's contemporaries.

Later on, I realised that this manner was customary with him without being in the slightest degree due to an immoderate habit of indulgence in whisky. Turnbull has certainly never signed the pledge, but he remains always clear-headed. He knows very well what he is doing when his perilous duties as officer in the Engineers oblige him to crawl along a barbed-wire entanglement. If you joke with him, he relishes slyly the effect he produces. But the revenge he takes on those comrades who tease him is first and foremost not to be killed, a feat rare enough in the engineers to be worth remarking, his predecessor having lasted only twenty-four hours. For weeks Turnbull in the middle of thousands of adventures has given the slip to death. Of all these adventures the following is perhaps the strangest :—

On this particular day, a battalion which had lately arrived, had to go for the first time into the trenches. In order to prevent

serious mistakes Turnbull was ordered to pilot the new-comers through the maze of underground passages.

It is always painful to leave a comfortable billet to go and shiver where bullets are flying all around you. Although the relief was timed for the end of the afternoon, Turnbull, wearing a Balaklava cap, started immediately after lunch, visiting several regimental messes of his acquaintance for the purpose of sampling a few bottles of "Black and White," which made him feel ready for anything when a little while later he found himself at the meeting-place. As soon as the Scotsmen appeared with bare legs and khaki kilts he came forward and said who he was. The tall second lieutenant who led the vanguard seemed to be abashed by his own size; he stuttered and hinted that it would perhaps be advisable to inform the colonel.

It is hard to give an idea of Turnbull's

language. But this is more or less what he answered in a cordial tone of voice :

“No need to trouble your old devil of a colonel. It isn’t the first time that I’ve led a battalion to these bally trenches.” After which he marched boldly at the head of the column.

Right up to the end of the relief all went well. For hitting upon the invisible entrance of a communication-trench in the middle of a monotonous barren tract Turnbull had not his match ; in passing over an exposed piece of ground he would turn fifty yards aside just in time to elude the machine-guns of the enemy. He was already feeling very pleased with his own dexterity, when he was sent for by the Scottish colonel. Turnbull expected to be thanked, but the man he found was cold and haughty.

“Who are you, sir ?” asked the colonel.

Turnbull, astounded, gave his name and qualifications. The colonel frowned and

examined him for a long while. Had the second lieutenant complained of Turnbull's disrespectful language?

"If it is true that you are what you say," continued the colonel, "where does this strange head-dress come from?" And without listening to the major's explanations, he gave the order that he should be placed under a strong guard. Two Scotsmen, with fixed bayonets, dragged him some distance and made him sit down in one of the trenches. Turnbull's first thought was that the colonel was going to avenge himself by depriving him of his dinner.

"Perhaps it was wrong of me to call him an 'old devil,'" he said to himself, "especially without knowing him; but he is certainly a swine."

Night had come on, and with it a thin rain which soaked the seat of his breeches with liquid mud. He asked if he might

speak to the colonel, but the two Scotsmen answered with a grunt only.

"It's a damned shame!" cried Turnbull angrily. "Besides, you have put me in the most cursed place possible. There's a cursed machine-gun which enfilades this cursed corner every night."

Some bullets passing close by him confirmed what he had said. But Scotsmen are slow to understand, and these here, though never having been under fire, pretended to know all about it, and would consent to move only a few steps away. Turnbull was no happier with those who came to relieve them. He passed the whole night in dodging bullets and in running down Scotland.

It was only on the following morning that he understood why he had been put under arrest.

"I have only just arrived at the front," the colonel said to him with a slight cough,

“but you cannot take me in. We know what German spies are capable of.”

These words were the last stroke, Turnbull was beside himself. Beneath the Balaklava cap his fat face, full of bristles of a dull red, gave him a singularly German appearance, and the vigour of his language completely convinced this obstinate Scotsman.

“You will explain at the divisional headquarters. Whilst waiting for you to be led there we shall put you in a safe place.”

By a fresh order of the colonel, Turnbull was taken to the foot of a hedge twenty paces behind the first-line trench. At first he believed himself to be the victim of a subtle piece of spite, but he was soon undeceived. The two fellows with hairy knees who were guarding him smoked their pipes untroubled, and to crown all, the enemy gunner began his morning spraying. These novices of war were gifted

with feeble imaginations, and apparently fancied that shrapnel was nothing more than the crackers of Guy Fawkes' Day. Turnbull, who was mistrusted by them, had soon to give up enlightening them.

"If this knocks me out," he thought to himself, in a moment of quiet resignation, "these two confounded idiots will be knocked out too."

He was at length taken from this uncomfortable position and sent towards the rear, where he soon found himself in the hands of three soldiers and a corporal who were being directed by the French interpreter attached to the regiment. This young man took his part very seriously, and compelled Turnbull to give up his revolver, claiming the right to search him.

"I'll wring your cursed neck," cried the major, furious. "Who are you to order me about? I order you to take me to this cursed division."

The corporal was commanded always to obey the interpreter, so Turnbull was forced to empty out his pockets. His humiliation was great when the interpreter in looking through his pocket-book discovered, in the middle of a bundle of suspicious-looking papers—divisional orders, sketches of trenches, letters from different places, and the like—the photograph of a young girl in a tobacco-shop in the neighbouring town.

At length the whipper-snapper gave the signal to start. From the point at which they were, the headquarters could easily be reached by an hour and a half's march. As he went along, the prisoner thought of the pleasure of wakening from this bad dream and of borrowing after lunch one of the motors belonging to the division in order to go and have a bath. But the interpreter had all of a sudden made a mistake at one of those cross-roads which turn a journey over

the plain of Flanders into a veritable goose-game.

"You idiot, you're retracing your steps!" said Turnbull. "Let me direct you. You don't know how to read a map."

The interpreter hesitated, but his self-respect got the better of his prudence. Besides, what confidence could he have in a spy who, without doubt, meditated leading his jailers into some trap or other? So he persisted in his error. For several hours the little band encircling the wretched major retraced its steps across the immense marshland where all the farms are alike, and where all the roads amuse themselves by running after each other. Night was already falling when they found themselves a second time, tired and hungry, at the precise spot at which Turnbull had been handed over in the morning to his tormentors.

"Here you are again!" said the colonel with irritation, when the prisoner was

brought back to him. "I wager that you have been caught here again."

I do not guarantee the authenticity of this last incident, related by Turnbull himself next morning at the mess-table. According to him he had once more passed the night between two sentinels in an uncomfortable place. Invoking Our Lady according to his wont, he inveighed against all the Scotch and every interpreter on earth, and wanted to know why God had created them.

"If I ever become a spy," he declared, "I shan't go and work among these dangerous idiots."

As his comrades had not seen him return they thought he had been killed—a natural though regrettable event. But the strangest thing of all is that instead of lodging a complaint, he was content to go and have a bath. He is just like that: nothing really angers or surprises him.

VII

THE RELIEF

December 1914.

THE headquarters staff of the French Brigade is stationed in the only house left standing in the village, five or six hundred yards from the first-line trenches. It is here that General J—— has received for weeks without turning a hair bullets and shells of every calibre. The only precaution taken is the arrangement of a few mattresses in the loft. At nightfall the iron shutters of the drawing-room form a shield against the firing of the enemy.

I proceed there on a rainy morning with two English officers, a major and a captain, to whom I have to show the sector. This is the first time that their regiment has relieved

a French unit. Wrapped up in their water-proofs, they only break silence to exchange in an undertone a few short oaths, when it happens that one of them slips on the wet clay. Two tall devils, wiry and lean. The captain, ordinarily an affable man, is silent out of respect for the major, and the major is silent from habit ; he is as well known for his nasty temper as for his mad bravery.

However, a magnificent shell-crater which yawns at the entrance of headquarters induces him to open his mouth.

“Where is the general’s shelter ?”

I inform him that General J—— has not had one dug.

“The cellar is a good one, of course ?”

As I reply that the cellar is full of water, he looks at the house, then at the crater, and says simply :

“Oh !”

We enter the room where General J—— usually works. My major stops dead in the

doorway, and I guess by his puzzled look that he believes he has entered the orderly room by mistake. As a matter of fact there are only two or three mud-stained soldiers there. The one with the fewest stripes on his sleeve is a little man with a small grey beard. His cap, tilted back, disappears under a broad blue cover.

The little man rises and comes towards us, stretching out his hand like a Territorial a little too familiar.

“Where is the general?” asks the major, with a certain amount of impatience.

I make him understand that he is in the presence of General J——, the man who organised the defence of the village in which we are, and who with a handful of reservists has held out a month and a half against forces three times superior to his own. The major’s confusion is conveyed by an abrupt smile, and his face, usually that of a grumbling Colonial, be-

comes that of a child caught in the act of committing a fault.

However, introductions are made, and the commandant whose business it is to conduct us through the sub-sector, excuses himself and puts on what he calls his trench-cloak. It is an amazing old-fashioned great-coat of no particular colour, which gives him the look of a monk. We are now on our way, our canes in our hands, following this singular type of prior.

The block of houses which we pass through to reach the entrance of the communication-trench is in a state of lamentable dilapidation. Certain dwelling-houses have been razed to the ground. Others, which seem, in the distance, to be whole, have only the front left, and look like colanders. An almost daily bombardment rages over these ruins, destroying roofs, ransacking miners' cottages, and sometimes bursting open cellars. The

commandant explains, nevertheless, to the English officers that this devastated district very luckily lends itself to the fitting up of regimental kitchens. In fact, many "poilus" are walking about in the rain in a costume anything but military, and one of them who takes his hands from his pockets to salute us as we pass, wears a workman's coat and corduroy trousers; of his uniform he has retained nothing but the cap.

"Are all these men soldiers?" the captain asks me in an undertone.

We go round the skeleton of a factory, and the commandant, anxious to do the honours of his sanatorium to us, stops us in the middle of the ruins.

"Explain to these gentlemen," he says, "that this spot is very dangerous here. *Very gefährlich*," he adds, in a voice like thunder, thinking he is speaking English. "At all hours of the day the Germans

fling volleys here from their seventy-sevens. Bullets fall here also. You must take care."

As though in order to illustrate his words, a hissing sound, fairly near to us, rends the air.

"Do you hear?" says the commandant, smiling amiably.

The major, standing erect, smiles also. He takes the same sort of pleasure in the place as a tourist who lingers before a view which interests him.

In the communication-trench which leads to the first line the commandant leads the way, and the major follows, stiff and silent. Without a word from him I know him well enough to guess his impressions. With each "poilu" that we meet, and who salutes us with quite a southern sprightliness, his astonishment increases. These slovenly reservists who preserve their peasant's appearance under their military overcoats, are they really the men who have

just indefatigably repulsed two or three German attacks? This question must be bothering him, for he turns round suddenly and asks me how long the battalion which is going to be relieved has occupied the sub-sector.

“For forty days.”

“Oh!”

Inspection of shelters. Here is the “Villa of the Sniffing Flea,” and the “lodging-house: Beds from $2\frac{1}{2}d.$ ” They are fine shelters, strong and spacious, proving that the vine-dressers of sunny lands know how to dig as well as the miners of the north. While he proudly shows us these serviceable works, the commandant speaks about his “children.”

“People have spoken badly of the reservists of the south, because at the beginning there were a few instances of weakness. I should like to know what troops have never flinched. If you had

lived, as I have, with this regiment here, you would have seen what the people of the south, of the true south, mind you, are capable of performing. . . . During the last attack of the Germans, these that I have here remained three days and nights under hell fire, without one instance of holding back. Directly one rifleman was killed, his comrade took his place without awaiting his officer's orders."

I translate all this to my English companions. The major himself listens attentively. The "Sniffing Flea" extracts a loud guffaw from him.

But we are now going along the first-line trench, and the commandant stops now and then and, clasping his hands like a lecturer, gives plenty of details concerning the organisation of the defence. It is evident that the major does not approve of all the arrangements made, and that he, too, has his theories as to the best position for the

parapets and as to the best way of protecting machine-guns. Nevertheless, this sort of military monk has succeeded in inspiring him with a certain respect, and at times he shows unreserved approval.

"Here," the commandant declares, "you must stoop down as you pass; the parapet was damaged by rain the day before yesterday."

The major thanks him and stands on tip-toe to look at the enemy position. A bullet or two greet him immediately.

"Look out!" repeats the commandant, looking in his turn.

From this moment they rival one another in foolhardiness. The major easily has the advantage at this game, for he has only to hold himself up straight, like the letter I, and the top of his cap sticks out of the trench.

We now come to a road which marks the extreme point of the sub-sector.

"Usually I return by this road," says

the commandant, "but for two or three hundred yards one is in full view of the German trench, so that, if you prefer it, we can retrace our steps and go back by the same communication-trench."

We deliberate a moment. It is obviously stupid to run this risk on open ground a few hundred yards from the enemy, but the major declares that the shortest route is necessarily the best, and we offer ourselves, in a batch, to the German bullets. We hardly hurry at all. As he trots along beside his huge English colleague the commandant does not confine himself to pointing to the position of the enemy trenches: he improves the opportunity for practising a foreign language, and speaks a noisy mixture of French, English, and German. The major, in his turn, tries 'French, and stops abruptly before pronouncing the difficult words. By a providential piece of good luck the Boches

do not perceive our rashness, except just as we reach the first houses of the village. A loud crack informs us that the first bullet fired at us has arrived, and has flattened itself against a wall. As he leads the way through the ruins the commandant does not conceal his complete satisfaction.

“These English are certainly fine soldiers. . . . Your major doesn’t look amiable, but he’s full of grit.’

A little while afterwards, as we draw near headquarters, the major takes me aside. I have never seen him so amiable.

“Thank the commandant,” he says, “he is a capital fellow.”

I receive the confidences of the captain also. His eyes smile at me seriously, and in a low voice he says to me : “I’m pleased, very pleased. . . . I had never seen your men in the trenches. They are a little untidy, but they please me. . . . I think we also ought to have conscription.”

VIII

THE ENGLISH TOMMY

December 1914.

I HAD a conversation yesterday with a Tommy of the stork kind, with lanky legs, arms like signals, and a head stuck on to a long neck. His close-fitting cloak, the colour of stagnant water, made him look taller still. Contrary to the legend which likes to make the English soldier out to be silent, this one, like his fellows, turns out to be communicative and confiding. "Twenty-two days in the trenches, sir—yes, *twenty-two*. The regiment has lost five hundred men. As for me, I have only had a scratch on the nose, but the bullet which did that killed my pal outright. Twenty-two days of drinking cold water : not a drop of tea."

He gave me these details in a quiet voice, without trying to work on my feelings. His battalion had "bagged" an incalculable number of the enemy, a fact which filled him with a gentle joy. I asked him whether the inhabitants gave the English soldiers a good reception. He answered with a sudden liveliness, that they were "awfully nice." "And how do you manage to make yourself understood?" "Oh, they don't know a word of English; but that doesn't matter, we understand one another all the same!"

The fact is, they are to be seen everywhere fraternising with the inhabitants. The other day, on the side of the road, I caught sight of two of them playing at football with ten urchins, the tallest of whom only came up to their middles. When one of these urchins got a goal, I asked the Tommies if they were not ashamed to let themselves be beaten by little French

boys. One of them turned round, and, with a good hearty laugh, replied in a strong Scotch accent, "We want to encourage 'em in sport." A little farther on, between two farms, a little soldier was strolling, with his pipe in his mouth and his knapsack on his back, escorted triumphantly by three young girls. In an enclosure, some were doing their cooking under the eyes of the astounded peasants. And on every side Anglo-French football matches were in progress. In the absence of a football, they were riddling with kicks a ball of rags or a lump of earth.

Assuredly the picture has its dark side. One evening last week, we came by surprise on a Tommy who would persist in forcing his way into a tavern which had closed. He had already smashed the glass of the entrance, and the tavern-keeper, frightened out of his wits, had just come down again in his socks. Questioned as to his intentions, the Englishman explained, in a

dignified but incoherent manner. He was drunk. The provost-marshal was obliged to punish him. But these are petty faults in men who are fighting. In reality the inhabitants complain but rarely of their khaki guests, and I have seen some who never leave off praising them. "Sure, they're a good sort, these men, and scarcely ever inconvenience us. They were told once not to go up to the gallery in the factory, and after that not one of them has climbed up there. Every evening at eight o'clock they are in bed, snoring." The foreman, moreover, who gave me this confidence, treats "his" soldiers considerately. At seven o'clock each evening he calls them together in his kitchen and makes them some tea. The Tommies drink the tea, and then strike up, in their calm, strong voices, some sentimental song in chorus.

For Tommy is fond of music. Some motor lorries belonging to the English army

are stationed in front of my house. Almost every day the scraping of a violin comes from one of them, and almost simultaneously numerous discordant voices rise in the silence of the plain, whilst the heavy guns, away there, beat time.

You should see them in the roads, arriving at their billet with a short step, rhythmic and quiet, which recalls the walk of a duck. Their jolly faces, reddened by the wind and washed by the rain, shine like so many suns above the earth-coloured uniforms, which make them invisible in the distance. They always look pleased, even when the reduced size of their column shows the losses it has suffered, and they are always ready to laugh as they pass if you nod to them in a friendly way. You feel that nothing astonishes them: they have been to so many foreign countries, that the north of France has no surprise in reserve for them. You guess, also, that they are ready "to pocket" many nasty knocks

with a smile, like boxers, but that it must be difficult to give them a "knock-out blow."

Their resistance, moreover, is astonishing. Not long ago, at the end of a long day's march, a battalion was allowed to rest for half an hour. In an instant knapsacks were on the ground and a game of football was arranged. The game was still going on when the blowing of a whistle sounded and called to them to "fall in." One of the players said to his officer: "You made me miss the finest kick of my life."

When they are wounded they display the same heedlessness as their blue-coated allies. I recollect a Red Cross train which was carrying away a hundred of them. Whilst waiting for the train to start, a thickset Scotsman, whose enormous calves were bristling with red hairs, walked up and down the platform, supporting his left hand, which was swathed in bloodstained bandages. He made a grimace and explained that

his hand had been pierced by shrapnel. But he changed the subject almost immediately and announced gaily that before being knocked out he had killed no small number of Germans. This remembrance was sufficient to console him.

They have often a keen sense of humour. During the battle of Ypres a German cavalry officer took a header into one of the English trenches, and picked himself up all over mud. "What a cursed war," he cried in English. The English soldier who was on the point of bayonetting him began to laugh and helped him to pick himself up.

Finally, the Tommies are philosophers. At the drinking-fountain the other day I heard one of them say to a comrade with conviction: "If you have any money, you'd better spend it to-day, you may be killed this evening."

IX

WITH THE CHASSEURS ALPINS

January 1915.

THEY had kept me to dinner one evening on the plea that they had got "some birds" for the occasion. To arrive at the mess-room at the bottom of the farm it was necessary to pick one's way carefully by the side of the stables, for fear of falling in the dung-pit. But this cold rainy night only served to make the welcome of the mess-room all the more cordial. Everything was there, a good fire, a lamp, a long table, and even some chairs. We were a little bit cramped for room, our elbows rubbed together, and I was aware of something not actually mentioned—namely, their grief at the thought of the two comrades whom

they had lost ten days before—two bright fellows, one of whom was the life and soul of this family group. But the lieutenant commanding the company, and who presided, would have cheered a dying man with his irresistible gaiety. It was the first time that I had seen him, and will be perhaps the last, but I shall never forget his ringing laugh and, above all, his bright eyes, sprightly like his whole being, eyes as clear as crystal, which made you want to embrace him on both cheeks.

The two other lieutenants, officers of the reserve, were good fellows, but less keen. One of them before sitting down to table had passed round the photo, which he had just received, of a handsome, thoughtful young woman, who was holding a little fellow in petticoats on her knees—one of those photos which are kept in the pocket of one's tunic, to be taken out when the crack of a whip has flung you on the wet ground, and

when you don't know whether you will get up again.

The captain of the next company had also been invited, and arrived carrying a lantern and wearing a long cape with holes in two places. Rid of his tam-o'-shanter, this forty-year-old soldier, made nobler by his beard, wore the look of a philosopher.

While they were enjoying the "birds," which, no mistake about it, were extremely good, they related their adventures to me. The most recent was only ten days old. The company was fresh from an attack in which it had taken part, and the success of which had been related in a few words in the official communiqué. The struggle had been stubborn. Having taken the hostile trench, the Alpine regiment had spent forty-eight hours in the rain resisting an intense gun-fire accompanied by grenades. That, after all, was only one of the ordinary episodes of their career. In a campaign

of five months, the battalion had been everywhere on the front, from Alsace to the Yser, and in each place it had been brought to the critical point to give the finishing stroke! Each time it had battered its way like a ram into the German line, and had then turned up its sleeves and dug some impregnable holes. After this it had made way for others, and had set out again in quest of new herculean labours.

“The Boches usually wait until we are not there before counter-attacking,” Lieutenant Quicksilver said to me.

Their experience has thus been complete, and they are acquainted with the habits of every kind of shell.

“There’s not much to fear from the seventy-sevens unless, of course, a shell from one of them falls on your big toe—and yet! Our friend B—— here has had one on the head, and he is as well as you or I.”

Friend B——, the man with the photograph, corrected this assertion. The shell had really burst twenty inches above his tam-o'-shanter, and everybody thought he was dead, but he had escaped with a few bruises in the back.

With a red wine, not much like Burgundy, the conversation rose to the height of "crumps."

"It is quite possible to remain in a village which is being shelled with crumps," Lieutenant Quicksilver declares. "I happened once to be in a small village with five companies of reserves which I was commanding. Some twenty-ones reached us. I did not lose a single man. Do you know why? When a crump lights on a house, it bursts either by coming in contact with the roof or the top floor. The first floor confines itself to falling to pieces, so that you have over the cellar a heap of ruins which protects you against

the crumps which follow. You should preferably stow your men away in these cellars, the cellars of houses which have collapsed. Then there's not much risk. Unfortunately," he added, with a laugh, "I was silly enough to go out into the street for a moment to see if the telephone wires were all right, when, bang! and a crump fell on a house fifteen paces away, bringing down a wall together with a bed on the first floor. You should have seen me take a header into my cellar."

But they soon returned to the last engagement, to the heroism of their men, lowering their voices when they spoke about them. A few details were slowly given by the philosopher captain.

"You must bear in mind that there isn't much fun in hurling oneself forward to attack. You know how it is done. We get the men together in the trenches, which have been cut out into tiers, and we

arrange with them that at a given moment they are all to spring out at once and run without stopping to the enemy trench. Our men know what they are in for. However perfect the artillery preparation, it always happens that several are hit at the very start. And then there's the mud in which they sink sometimes right up to the knee; there's no fun in falling in the mud with a bullet through your body. And then our 'poilus' know that, once across the other side, some of them will have to submit to being murdered by grenades, whilst others will have to bar the way in the communication-trenches by which the enemy can return to the attack, and which are swept by his machine-guns. They must have seen that twenty times, and yet, would you believe it, at the moment of starting they don't falter for a second. The only one who stayed behind the other day was a poor devil who had gone out

of his mind." Hesitating an instant, he added :

"All those who fell that day fell head foremost."

There was a short silence. No doubt thoughts not quite so gay were passing through their minds. They were thinking perhaps of the little soldiers lying in the clay, whose familiar faces called up many months of hardships which they had undergone together ; of the two comrades seriously wounded, doomed may be, whose hearty voices were still ringing in their ears. And what was the future going to be like ? I had talked long enough with them to be sure that they were under no illusions about that. At each new stage of their journey along the front some members of the mess disappeared in their turn. How many of them had any chance of seeing the end of the war ? The likeness of that pensive young wife haunted me.

A roar of laughter from Quicksilver

roused us from our reverie. The cook, a lad whose trumpet-like nose alone was as good as a joke, had just finished putting on the table a bunch of white flowers hideously arranged in an earthenware vase.

“That, old fellow, is a present from your parishioners !”

All eyes were turned on my right-hand neighbour opposite, the second of the officers of the reserve, a man with rather a melancholy face adorned with a thick military moustache.

I demanded the answer to the riddle.

“Of course you don’t know,” said the captain. “Your neighbour is a vicar, and the people of this parish here offer him this bouquet, because he has just been mentioned in dispatches.” Addressing himself to Quicksilver, he continued :

“By the bye, my dear chap, here’s a tip for you in confidence : the battalion starts to-morrow evening for a destination unknown. . . .”

X

SOME FRENCH TERRITORIALS

January 1915.

I AM free to confess that before I saw them at work I did not much believe in our old men. Reserves as well as regulars joke freely about the "terrible territorials." Great, however, was my surprise one day when I heard a brigadier-general, who had held a particularly threatened part of the line for forty-five days under a hail of shells, say to me: "There's nothing like Territorials for defending a trench."

To-day such a remark would scarcely surprise me. You must take the trouble to understand the Territorial.

I often see Lieutenant-Colonel C——,

who commands, say, the 542nd T. He is to be found at all hours in his passage. Rather than inconvenience the people of the farm where he is billeted, he has, in fact, arranged in this uncomfortable "room" his dining-room, his study and the regimental offices. His old soldier's bald head emerges from a long great-coat in which he is buried up to the chin. Captain R——, a notary, is always to be seen with him.

"I am an old brute of a soldier and R—— is a wretched civilian, and yet in spite of that we can't do without one another."

The notary has won the colonel's friendship not only by his invariable good temper, but also by the pluck he has many a time shown under fire. For this man of the law, ordinarily not at all warlike, has been able to get his company over several hundred yards under a hail of bullets. Still oftener,

in some hole or other, he has been called upon to put up with a shower of "crumps" without moving an inch. He does not miss his practice much.

Both manage the affairs of the regiment in a fatherly way.

"Captain R——," orders the colonel, "see to this paper."

The captain examines the paper, and turning towards the writer, a solicitor from Paris, says :

"Put down : The companies will receive as supplementary ration one tin of sardines per each five men."

A man who had been wounded and sent back by his dépôt comes in. The splinter of a shell had torn the palm of his right hand three months previously. He comes forward with a broad smile and lifts a hand, still swollen, to his cap.

"Here you are, my good man ! Let's have a look ! Come, you're all right now.

You can go and take a rifle and fire at these beasts again ! ”

“ I should like to have my re-revenge, Colonel, but—— ”

The councillor-captain leans down to the ear of his chief, no doubt to make the observation that the man is not yet fit to go back to the trenches.

“ That’s all right,” growls the colonel. “ You’ll rejoin your company all the same, and you’ll make arrangements for settling accounts with these bandits, eh ? ”

The convalescent’s face expands once more, and he proclaims his desire of having his revenge, without hearing the colonel say in a whisper to his faithful assistant :

“ You’ll leave him in the kitchens.”

The fact is, old C—— has a weakness, which he acknowledges without false shame. He adores his men collectively and individually. Everything which affects them affects him. He is delighted at the

idea of them having an extra half-bottle of wine, and is miserable when the weather turns cold and wet. He gives news of them to their families. One of his letters was recently published in the local paper. It reads like this :

“MY DEAR CHILDREN,

“Your papas have received their presents and thank you for them through me. They are real bricks, and after the war you may well be proud to walk about with them hand-in-hand.

“LIEUTENANT-COLONEL C——.”

But, to make up for this, the man who has a soft heart for his own men cherishes with regard to the enemy the implacable hatred of a mother whose children have been ill-treated. The other day, on the firing line, a German officer stammering French was brought to him. The colonel questioned him in a voice of thunder :

“So German officers give themselves up?”

“Colonel!”

“Hold your tongue! Where are you from?”

“From the Grand Duchy of Baden, Colonel.”

“You mean from the little—the little Duchy of Baden? There’s no such thing as the Duchy of Baden, there’s only Prussia. You are all Prussians, all flunkys of the Kaiser, the tiny little Kaiser, no higher than this!”

He continues insulting the enemy army, the Kaiser, Prussia and “Kultur,” when at last the prisoner manages to get a word in.

“Colonel, I’m wounded.”

It was quite true. The colonel relented immediately, but considered it superfluous to apologize.

For a chief like this the 542nd would get cut up if he asked them to. The

Territorials are like that. Independent and a little familiar, they have not always a proper respect for rank, and would think nothing of clapping their company-commander on the back. But know how to take them and they will follow you wherever you like, with a determination often calmer than that of younger men. They are not for nothing "poilus" among "les poilus." A proof of that was afforded us quite recently. On the evening of a critical day the order was received by one of the battalions of the same regiment to counter-attack in the middle of the night a position which there had not been time to reconnoitre. The colonel had only given this order reluctantly. He encouraged them in a firm voice, and then returned erect to his report centre.

The battalion set out. The night was as black as the inside of the ovens of the half-destroyed factory by which they were

groping their way ; the ground, which was soaked and clammy, gave under their feet. It was not known exactly where the enemy was, and in the darkness the bullets seemed to be coming from everywhere. In a few minutes' time the guide who accompanied the leader of the battalion announced that the trench to be retaken was not more than eighty yards farther on. He then bowed and left the "poilus" in a field of mud which appeared to be as vast as a desert. By order of the commanding officer, who had now a bullet in the arm, the men threw themselves down flat and proceeded to crawl, like so many big worms, in the direction indicated. They went eighty yards, but no trench, only a murderous fire and the impossibility of guessing from where it was coming. They advanced still farther. At this moment the situation became perilous. A unit was giving way on their right, and on their left there was nothing but

empty space. They ran the risk of being outflanked and cut up. But by good luck those in the first ranks suddenly reached a sort of communication-trench which must have done duty as a means of access to the first-line trenches. Although it was a case of being up to the knee in water, the battalion entrenched itself there, and the commandant sent word to the brigadier-general that he was now certain of being able to hold out. It was not he who fulfilled his promise, for a second bullet forced him almost immediately to abandon his post. But the Territorials showed that he had not lied. All night long they held on to their bath, and when the reinforcements came next day to relieve them, it had to be admitted that the veterans had saved the situation.

I saw the colonel on his return from the engagement, black and unshaven, his features drawn by forty-eight hours of

nervous tension. He sank into a chair and stretched out his muddy boots to his orderly.

“My poor ‘poilus,’” he repeated. “It’s too much!”

The grief caused him by the losses his regiment had suffered dominated every other impression. It was not without indignation that he related events as yet unknown to me, and showed me a Prussian helmet which he had, he said, certainly the right to bring back, adding :

“All the same, you will allow that my fathers of families are worth something.”

XI

A GUNNER

February 1915.

HE is a colonel in the regulars, but you would be inclined to question it on seeing him on a cold day with his hands in the pockets of his threadbare great-coat, an old civilian over-coat the cut of which is earlier than the present century. His blue Alsatian eyes smile, somewhat slyly, in the middle of a face covered with thick tawny hair. He makes you think of an intelligent and good-natured *griffon* stalking in between the batteries for his own pleasure in the vague expectation of seeing game.

But all those who know him admit, with one voice, that he is a redoubtable antagonist. The Germans, too, know something of

him: since he came to the division the enemy batteries have given up firing on the town situated a few miles in the rear of the French lines, which before they had sprinkled every day for five weeks.

The day I was introduced to him he was particularly sprightly. A piece of intelligence the day before had betrayed the presence of a German divisional headquarters in a neighbouring village at the front. The same evening, between eleven o'clock and midnight, a gust of French shells swept down on the village.

"You see that from here, don't you?" he said to me, rubbing his hands. "Well, at that hour the Boche headquarters staff must have been sleeping, and the general must have bolted out of bed and gone down to the cellar with his boots in his hands."

The picture of this filled him with serene contentment. As a hostile shell was passing at this moment a long way over

our heads, he put his nose in the air in order to catch the wind. Reassured about its direction, he added :

“They are furious this morning, but what odds does that make to us? They have never managed to drop a shell on our batteries, and we shall be starting again soon !”

He kept his word. This devil of a man is indefatigable. Day and night he broods over his work. It would not take much to make him sleep, like Turenne, on his guns, so as not to miss a favourable opportunity. Crumps scarcely ever alarm him. One day, one burst a yard away from him, but he had time to throw himself down flat, holding his hands to his ears, so that the wind made by the shell did no more than turn him over on his back.

Bombardments by night, of which it is seldom possible to observe the results, are much less to his taste than a nice raking

fire directed, in the course of an attack, against a German company, drawn up in sections of fours. This good-natured man, who would not crush a fly, and who, if need be, would take in every stray dog, hardly succeeds in such a case in hiding his happiness, and declares soberly :

“ We’ve landed them a good one on the jaw,” or :

“ Not many of them left after that.”

Thereupon he sets to work immediately to prepare fresh massacres.

Prisoners amuse him. His German, which is rough and familiar, allows him to converse with them without an interpreter, and he is quite ready to avail himself of it.

“ Imagine what happened,” he said to me one day. “ We captured an officer of the Boches, who said he was a medical officer. We treated him as such, and invited him even to mess. But this did not

convince me : he seemed a curious kind of doctor. So I recommended that he should be put to the test—for instance, that he should have to dress a wound. I was not mistaken. He handled a case of surgical instruments as a pig switches his tail. When we saw that, we shoved him into the lock-up.”

I was trusted with this secret in the presence of a young German prisoner picked up the previous night, a little student of seventeen, all over mud like a water-spaniel, of whom I remember nothing but an enormous pair of spectacles and two sleeves too long for him. This youngster was full of his own importance, and expected us to take him seriously. According to his own account, he was a student of philosophy, and ready to prove, with the help of scientific arguments, that the responsibility for the war rested not with Germany, but with France and, still more, with England.

The colonel listened to him patiently, and gave him a little fatherly tap on the shoulder.

“Your mother will be glad, eh? No more bullets for you. You are going to be well taken care of.”

The student looked at him, dumbfounded. This Alsatian geniality evidently disturbed his “Weltanschauung,” so he took refuge in silence, trying hard to appear dignified.

The only drawback about the colonel is that he takes his business too much to heart; and, being unaccustomed to failure, the smallest mishap causes him genuine grief. He is then to be found saying in a worried voice, in the middle of his officers, who remain silent and attentive:

“We ought to have done this; we were wrong in doing that. There’s no denying it, it’s a total failure” (in such cases he always exaggerates the misfortune). . . . “I did my utmost; but the infantry want the artillery

to take on the whole work. . . . If I leave my batteries where they are, I shall be told that they are too far away ; and if I bring them nearer, I shall be accused of bombarding our own trenches. . . .”

These moments of impatience usually precede others in which he gives the clearest commands and makes the happiest dispositions.

His optimism is, moreover, unshakeable. He makes war on Germany with such profound joy and with such conviction that, even at times when others have felt alarmed, never has the slightest doubt been able to touch him as to the final issue of the struggle. The wish is father to the thought. He knows that the hour for which he has waited from infancy has at last struck. The Prussian empire already appears to him like a thing of the past, so certain is he of the approaching end, like a man who is engaged in a duel to the death with a

monster whose weak point is known to him.

Underneath his arguments, which are sometimes bantering, there is always a sensible notion. Here is one which he gave us long before the effects of the blockade in Germany were spoken of :

“The Germans can’t do without pig, and the pig can’t do without potatoes. But the Germans, for want of corn, will eat potatoes. Hence a vicious circle : Pigs will die of hunger and the Germans also.”

XII

THE OLD FOLKS

February 1915.

A SMALL thatched cottage, standing fifty yards off the high road. To open the door you must insert your finger in a hole and lift up the latch. Grandmamma then comes forward, with arm akimbo, and invites you to step into the kitchen, "which is warm even in winter when the weather is cold." She is seventy-one, but is still hale and upright, her eight children notwithstanding. Grandpapa is seventy-six. He is deaf and stoops when he walks, and when he wishes to light his long clay pipe he puts his enormous mouth, which is like a piece of yellow

leather, close to the kitchen stove and lights it at the bars in front, spitting three or four times on the floor.

Through the window, between the pots of geraniums, English soldiers and convoys may be seen passing and repassing along the road all day long. Some heavy batteries are in the orchards hard by, and now and then a detonation shakes the house, some of the window-panes of which have already been replaced by packing-paper.

The old folks have only been away from this house for a week during the time when the village was under German occupation. They came back in the wake of the French shells, but grandmamma, who is wary, keeps her linen packed in the bread-bin. At the present time she is putting up one of her daughters, her son-in-law who is fifty, their son Francis, a boy of twelve, who reads the paper aloud to them, and a nephew of twenty-six, Victor, who has been

rejected as medically unfit. This latter is one of the "lucky sort."

Yesterday when I arrived, grandmamma offered me some coffee and a slice of bread six inches long, cut evenly and beautifully thin, and spread with good white butter. I had to accept one of their beds for the night. The sheets were chilly and rough, and by lifting my hand from where I lay I could have touched the joists of the ceiling.

Naturally we chatted, and they asked me when the war would end.

"Oh," says grandmamma, "William wants there to be only one master in Europe, just like there's only one God. As if it wasn't a terrible shame to make the poor world perish like this!"

The daughter, who has hardly any more teeth than grandmamma, tells me how she had to escape from the little farm in which she and her husband had invested

THE OLD FOLKS

their savings. To-day that farm is still in the line of fire.

“We saved our clothes, our cattle, and a small quantity of oats, but all the rest has been taken. By this time it's perhaps all destroyed.”

When I congratulate her on her smiling good humour, she answers :

“At first we wept, but now we are beginning to get used to it: it is no use complaining.”

But it is with grandmamma that I have the longest talks. I know now that she has bravely borne and brought up three girls and five boys. One of the boys died before the war ; the four others have been mobilised.

“All of them had a trade. The one who is dead was a harness-maker, and there was one who was a shoemaker, like grandpapa, and another a farrier. They were all three good children, well brought

up and industrious. They were on our hands without earning anything until the age of sixteen or eighteen, but before the war came they were all settled each in his own home, except the youngest, who is unmarried and who sleeps in your bed."

As she speaks, she gently rubs the brim of the stockpot which is simmering over the fire. Her house smells of potato-soup and household bread, and when the cannon is not booming, the loud ticking of a clock can be heard, like somebody walking in wooden shoes.

"They have lost everything by now," she went on. "My daughter, who had a small farm, had saved her cow and her mule, but the calf got away. Then the Prussians came, and that meant that everything was taken: sacks of corn for the trenches, cupboards, beds, clocks. By this time her house is empty, that's to say if it's still standing." Nor does she know

what has become of the forge of her son, the farrier. It is in the hands of the Germans, and no doubt destroyed now like everything else. Grandmamma relates these misfortunes unmoved.

But grandpapa, who up to now has been tapping on the sole of a soldier's boot, joins, as a deaf person is apt to do, in the conversation.

"And you've slept well all the same? It's a poor man's bed, but we offer it you willingly."

I thank him, and then try and give grandmamma some hope—the inhabitants who have suffered from the invasion will be indemnified, etc. She receives these declarations of mine politely.

"Sure," she says, "others have made good profits; they have sold milk and butter dear, for four shillings and twopence a pound. The country's a rich country——"

"One of our boys," interrupts grandpapa,

"was at Maubeuge. He wrote at the beginning that he was with firemen there. I don't know, but ever since then we have had no news of him. He may be dead."

Grandmamma, who dislikes words of evil omen, draws herself up, and says:

"Certainly not; it means that he is a prisoner in Germany."

Grandpapa looks harder at me through his spectacles, which he has put on crooked. The old man, however, sticks to his opinion.

"It's like the youngest," he answers; "he was in the Forty-third at Lille. It's four weeks since he wrote."

"Three weeks," says grandmamma.

"Perhaps he's dead too," says the old man sadly.

In my turn I make efforts to reassure him, and plead the delays in the post. Grandmamma approves unreservedly of

what I am saying, but I can see quite well that her eyes are wet. The poor fellow in the 43rd is the youngest. He was still under her care when the war came and snatched him brutally from her. Before going, he had asked her for some socks and a small money-order. She sent him "the small money-order."

At the present time each is at work. I am writing by a window. Grandpapa has returned to the sole of the soldier's boot, and little Francis, who without doubt will be a shoemaker some day, is giving him the benefit of his advice. Grand-mamma passes to and fro from the walnut cupboard to the kitchen stove, which is for ever alight. Now and then she sighs.

"If you find the door shut when you come in this evening you've only got to give a rap and I'll open it for you."

XIII

HAROLD

February 1915.

WE have called him "the prince" ever since the day when a Tommy, seeing him pass, pronounced in amazement :

" I bet that's the Prince of Wales."

This mistake had nothing unusual about it. The English army abounds in quite young officers, who, without having modelled themselves on the most famous among them, have the same clear complexion and straightforward look as he : keen, healthy boys, who smile at war and add grace to British strength.

Our prince is quite twenty-two, but looks only eighteen—such, at least, is the opinion of the shop-girls of Béthune, whom he

has never dared look at. He has not the shadow of a moustache, and, although he has the muscles of an athlete, his movements have retained the awkward hastiness of early youth. Eight days after his arrival at the front, he upset a Norman clock one evening which happened to be in the way of his long feet. Ever since then it is enough for us to hear the noise of a falling chair in the adjoining room for one of us to call out immediately:

“Harold isn’t far off!”

Besides this, he has a passion for jams. He prefers it to tobacco. In winter, as his skin is still very delicate, he suffers cruelly from chilblains.

Everybody likes him, and I most of all. At war the real part of a man’s character is soon revealed. Now, this childish exterior conceals the most serious and strongest of natures. The modest duties of Harold, those of A.D.C., doom him to perform

certain ungrateful jobs. At a billet, it is he who makes terms with the occupier ; under fire, perilous missions, not worth a major's life, are entrusted to him. The prince performs these diverse tasks with invariable good grace.

I never saw him lose his self-control but once. The general was then lodging in the house of an irritable Flemish woman, for whom a halfpenny was a halfpenny. Every morning, between nine and ten, she discovered fresh reasons for considering the headquarter's cook a perverse creature, bent on ruining her, and poor Harold had to submit to a long discourse, punctuated with sobs. He listened patiently, although always busy, and confined himself to being amazed at the quantity of tears which nature had put at the disposal of this strong, healthy person for the defence of her own interests. However, one day his hostess passed the bounds of indiscretion. Pretending that her

ample wine-cellar was one bottle short, she dragged him into a dark basement and kept him there half an hour. When he came up he was white with rage.

"This woman is unbearable," he said to me with heat. "After all, if we are here, it's not for our pleasure. Would she sooner have the Germans?" etc. . . .

The Flemish woman had imparted her eloquence to him. I chaffed him about it, and he smiled.

I admire him still more in the evening when the general, who does with little sleep, forgets to go to bed. Without ever having been told to, he believes himself obliged to sit up also. He begins by writing long letters in pencil to his mother and sisters. Then the pencil falls from his hand. He dozes over the *Illustrated London News*, then over the *Sketch*, and *The Times* completes his torture. However, the prince never complains.

When I tease him and tell him that a pretty girl has ogled him, he answers, "Go away!"

I should have thought him cold, if I had not seen him one evening with tears in his eyes when he came to hear of an injustice which had been done to one of his comrades.

It is under fire that our prince pleases me most. Not that he shows himself exceptionally rash: if he enjoys his stay in a trench, he feels no unhealthy pleasure in receiving Jack Johnsons, "crumps" as he calls them. But no bombardment, however disagreeable, has ever disturbed him in the minute performance of his duties.

I can see him again another day when he had to prepare the report centre on a sort of mole-hill, which was being furiously bombarded by the German artillery. Of all the points for half a mile round about it was certainly the most prominent. When I

arrived there I found Harold standing ten feet from the shelter where headquarters was stationed. His cap, with its red band, had never fitted his head more elegantly. In passing, I inquired whether he was admiring the view.

"It isn't that," he said, with great seriousness; "but there isn't a mess-room fit for the general. I'm having one dug by the sappers."

As he said, some men were picking up the ground at the bottom of a trench. The prince superintended from above, meditating all the while on the number of plates, forks and spoons required. Five minutes after a shell fell at his feet; by good luck it was the trunk of a tree which received the splinters.

"I've just had a bit of a shock," he said to me, smiling like a young lady,

He was subsequently awarded the Military Cross. He had thoroughly deserved it ever

since he had rushed with absolute naturalness into danger. But in the midst of general rejoicing, he was the only man to show himself genuinely vexed.

"It's idiotic," he repeated. "I sleep every night in a bed: these things ought to be kept for the poor devils in the trenches."

XIV

AFTER NEUVE-CHAPELLE

March 1915.

SEVEN o'clock in the evening. Suddenly the lights of the car show us a grey mass on the road. An English regiment is coming back from the trenches after having fought for three days and having lost in an attack the half of its men. Hand grenades hurled against them from a distance of ten yards, jets of burning petroleum, an enfilading fire issuing from invisible casemates—there was nothing missing, and yet nothing could stop them ; they were only too glad to be able at last to spring out of their holes and “have a go at them,” as they say, nor did they turn back to see their comrades—

the pals who had fallen during the charge and were breathing their last in silence.

I stop to watch them go by and my heart is heavy, for their losses are our losses. Like us, they are giving their lives for a noble cause, fearlessly and unostentatiously, without any bombastic "God with us," and their blood mingles so often with ours on the soil of France, that when they are struck down, it is we who suffer.

They are coming nearer. The officer who leads the way is quite young, perhaps it is he who is now in command. In the dusk the stains of mud on their cloaks, which are the same colour as the earth, produce the effect of whitish reflections.

But the boy officer advances, cane in hand, with an elastic supple step. The men in the first platoon march after him rhythmically, with their pipes in their mouths, and the pavement rings with their resolute footsteps. Their appearance betrays

neither fatigue nor depression. Others pass singing, and farther, out of sight, a whole company passes whistling in chorus. This is customary with Tommies ; they appreciate fifes more than bugles. I listen. That march, the quiet rhythm of which reminds me of Tipperary, is nothing less than the Marseillaise. The whole of the left wing of the battalion repeats in the same way the old revolutionary song which has now become an English national hymn, and which often invigorates them. In the rear there is actually a "poilu," playing the Marseillaise on an accordion. Those who are near him march with a brisker step.

Were it necessary, these men would return to-morrow to the firing line, smoking their pipes, with the same coolness.

The next day, towards the end of the afternoon, whilst the English artillery is

firing its most furious volley against the German lines, I pick up three wounded soldiers on another road who are limping towards the ambulance, accompanied by an unwounded companion who has the slight, regular features of a young girl, and who helps me to hoist the three Tommies into the car and to settle the one with the most serious wound, namely, a shell-splinter in the foot. The young lady then jumps on to the footboard, and we start for the hospital in the adjoining town. We have difficulty in getting along. The road is blocked by ambulance-wagons. Going in the other direction, limbers, staff motors, platoons of cavalry at full trot, admirably mounted and carrying their lances, follow after one another. At my leisure I am able to hand some chocolate to my Tommies, who have empty stomachs, and to learn that I am transporting two Irishmen and one Englishman.

Naturally they do not know where they come from ; it is enough for them to have penetrated into the German trenches somewhere, and to have killed a heap of "Boches." The elder of the Irishmen, whose dark face bristles with an eight-days' beard, attempts to give a confused account, of which I only catch a few scraps.

"We leaped into their trenches . . . they fled."

"You saw them run ?"

"Certainly," they cry, all three.

They laugh in a quiet, good-natured way, as if their adventure had left them nothing but pleasant memories. The Englishman quite cheerfully considers his thigh, which is bare beneath his torn trousers, in which a shrapnel bullet has lodged. He tells us that he is going to request the surgeon to give him the bullet as a "soo-vener."

The second Irishman, however, becomes excited. He is a very jolly fellow, with a

fair moustache, and must be difficult to keep within bounds on St. Patrick's Day.

"They're dirty brutes," he says. "I've seen one of their officers stab one of our hospital attendants whilst his wounds were being dressed. But they soon settled him."

All three described to me, not without heat, the acts of treachery they had seen committed by the Germans. As good sportsmen they would willingly forget the blows they might have received from an adversary within the rules of the game. But the Germans' want of fairness inspired them with a contempt and an enmity which would make it very difficult to pardon them. They dislike being hit below the belt.

Suddenly one of them breaks off :

"Hallo, sergeant !" he cries gaily.

On the seat of an ambulance-waggon in front of us lolls a wounded man, from one of whose hands, which is wrapped round with red-stained bandages, blood trickles

every now and then. He is my Englishman's sectional sergeant. They exchange a little good-natured banter, and then the sergeant smiles and shows the other his hand.

However, we leave behind the ambulance-wagon and come up with a convoy of about a dozen prisoners, walking along in twos and enclosed by a few bayonets. They are sad, silent and pale, like school-boys expecting to be flogged. My three Tommies stop talking and look at them.

"Swine," says the Irishman between his teeth, as he shakes his fist at them.

On reaching the hospital they all shake hands with me like gentlemen, even the one who can only stand on one foot.

Their indifference is incredible. A few yards behind the trench they are to be seen walking with their hands in their pockets, or even in process of performing their morning ablutions under fire. A few days

ago, owing to the German artillery, an English brigade was obliged to change its headquarters. The sentinel had been forgotten, but, true to his orders, Tommy remained at his post in the middle of the street, without so much as thinking of taking cover.

“What constitutes the strength, and at the same time the weakness of our men,” an English officer said to me, “is their absolute want of imagination. None of them tries to picture to himself what might possibly happen to him a moment ahead. As long as a bullet has not taken the trouble to hit him, it is non-existent for him. This is the reason of his good spirits and also of his indiscretion.”

XV

CRUMPS

March 1915.

“WHEN crumps have stopped coming over we joke about them in a cocksure way, but while they are coming over there is a little less assurance about us.”

More than once I have proved the accuracy of this observation recently made to me by some soldier or other fresh from the trenches.

The other day, quite by chance, I came across my own brother—a big devil of a naval officer—who for four months has been in command of a motor machine-gun section. I thought he was still at Ypres, but, however, we were not very surprised to meet : it takes a lot to astonish us now.

We fell into each other's arms, and gripped one another to be quite certain that we hadn't grown thinner. My brother's cheeks were, in fact, a little hollow, but he looked fresh and keen.

"You'll have lunch with us," he said to me authoritatively. "We live in a quiet place, not like the one over there."

As he said, the house with its courtyard in front wore a peaceful aspect. Some artillerymen were shoeing a horse in front of the coach-house, and a little farther off some soup was cooking, while on the road in front of the railings of the house some regimental wagons and troopers were passing. You might have imagined yourself at manœuvres but for the two ruined towers which stuck up two hundred yards away on the top of a grassy hummock, like two stumps of teeth. Now these ruins, a few months old, already belonged to the past.

"Their shells never come farther than

the other side of those towers," my brother declared. "Every day they throw some seventy-sevens on to the wood you see to our left, but everybody laughs at them."

By name I already knew my brother's chief, a colonel in the artillery, to whom he introduced me. He is a man of polished manners, with a cool clear head. He treats war as an interesting problem, but knows nevertheless how to adapt himself to all its other aspects. He is, in fact, one of those men to whom you are grateful for giving you, from the very first, a good opinion of the French race. The young officers of whom his staff is composed, half of whom have already a wound to their credit, put up with the inconveniences of billets too small for them, and with my brother's excessive familiarity with unvarying cheerfulness. The habit he has of speaking loud and of always having a hand

on some one's shoulder he owes to his rowdy past as a midshipman.

At table, they soon began to relate their adventures at Ypres, and particularly the bombardment of K——.

“It's a little village of the same kind as this,” said my brother. “We had just taken up our quarters there, and everything seemed so calm that I had asked the colonel to authorise me to bring up my motors which were in waiting a mile and a quarter to the rear. The luncheon hour arrives. The meal promises to be succulent, for the fat P——,” he added, in cracking a joke at the expense of the mess-lieutenant, “had surpassed himself; when suddenly a crump came crashing down, then a second and a third, and then several at once—a regular bombardment and, by Jove, a hot one. The whole village was subjected to it.”

This recollection amused them all. The moment before their house was destroyed

they had all gone down into the cellar with the colonel. But their position there had been for a long time critical, for shells, the smallest of which measured six inches, were bursting in the street right against their vent-hole. Covered with plaster and half suffocated by the smoke, they remained there four whole hours. At the end of which, the colonel, who had taken out his watch, succeeded in establishing "the rule": thenceforth three minutes elapsed between each gust. A move was made in double quick time, the motors were got ready to start, and immediately after the next crump the staff decamped at top speed.

"During this four hours' bombardment," said one of the officers, "in the whole of the village only one man was killed and two slightly wounded."

They were now laughing about it. The conversation grew very spirited, and as the taste for general topics never palls in a

French billet, especially among artillery officers, all the questions of the hour were reviewed, not forgetting the intervention of Japan. The colonel, whose culture was astonishing, spoke about Japan better than a book on the subject. I listened to him with so much interest that I barely noticed a dull sound, like the slamming of a door, which was followed by a strange phenomenon : a piece of glass the size of a five-franc piece had just come away from the window and had been shattered on the floor.

“Hallo ! one of their hundred-and-fives !” said the colonel.

He returned to the subject of Japan quite calmly. From where I was I could see the courtyard where a man was standing by the front gate, when, all of a sudden, I saw him throw himself backwards holding his head down. Almost at the same moment some rubbish shot over his head, whilst a deafen-

ing crash hurled the rest of the window-pane upon the dining-room floor.

"That, Colonel, is one of their hundred-and-fifties," said one of the officers.

The conversation dropped at the same time as the window-pane. The mess-lieutenant went out, and came back almost immediately.

"We are right in their path, Colonel," he announced, with what, I must say, seemed to me to be a forced smile.

The muscles of the colonel's nose twitched. Different hypotheses were advanced as to where the crumps were coming from. What, however, appeared certain was that the second had burst only fifty yards away from the house.

"It looks as if they are on the increase," observed a lieutenant, and, as if to confirm his words, the report of a third explosion was heard immediately behind the house, and the window of the room next to ours

was blown out in its turn. At this everybody got up.

“We are hemmed in now ; the fourth is for us.”

This mathematical conjecture, put forward by experts, seemed to me disagreeable. The slightest crump of fifteen centimetres would have smashed the shanty in which we were assembled from top to bottom, and from this moment I had the presentiment of an approaching catastrophe. I had the odd idea of sheltering underneath a doorway in case the upper storey should collapse ; but, perceiving that the colonel and his staff were putting on their cloaks, I imitated them, though not without experiencing strange difficulty in remembering where I had left my things.

“Bring the coffee !” ordered the colonel.

I heard the cook say to his assistant, half in joke and half in earnest : “We haven’t more than five minutes to live.” The coffee

made its appearance, and we joked and drank it standing. As I took my cup in one hand and my saucer in the other, I felt them knock against each other with an uncontrollable trembling against which my will was powerless—an effect all the more humiliating as, in circumstances more dangerous but less unexpected, I had not had occasion to blush for my nerves. I consoled myself with remembering the words, “Thou tremblest, vile body!” and with noticing that one of the second-lieutenants gave a shrug to his shoulders under the pretext that it was cold. Another murmured :

“It’s K—— over again.”

We had been waiting for five minutes and the fourth shell did not come. Was it after all only a simple range-finding fire? Was the enemy merely experimenting with his shots, in order to send us a blast of crumps all at once? My hosts considered these various suppositions coolly, but with-

out relish. I pictured to myself, with increasing vividness, the bursting of a shell through the window and the effect it would produce. The colonel, fearing, as he said, a serious bombardment, had persuaded me to leave after the next shell. From time to time he repeated :

“What annoys me is this draught. As it was, it wasn’t particularly warm here.”

Outside, an artilleryman was quietly holding an officer’s horse. He was not thinking about taking shelter in the stables, although there was plenty of room there, the horses having huddled close together after the first explosion.

Suddenly a detonation made the house shake, then a second, and it was with difficulty that I repressed a start.

“This time it’s a departure,” said the colonel.

True enough, it was our hundred and fifty-fives entering into action, in their en-

deavour, no doubt, to punish the German battery. It was incredible that it should have remained so long without continuing to fire. At the end of ten minutes the officers began to speak with contempt of the want of munitions from which the enemy appeared to be suffering. After a quarter of an hour they got me to go. I made up my mind to it, though not without indulging in some pretence of prolonging the conversation on the doorstep.

A few days afterwards I returned to make sure that the house was still standing. I found them all in extremely good spirits, no fresh shell having troubled them since I went away. The broken window had been replaced by a plank, and not only had all alarm been forgotten, but they even denied having had a single moment's apprehension.

"Sometimes they fire on the slope near the towers, but the house is in no danger," my brother declared to me with confidence.

“And you know,” another said with a laugh, “they were not fifteens but the twenty-ones. You attracted them here! Come and see the hole.”

The crater was, indeed, very fine. It would have been possible to stand up in it without being seen. They made me a present of a splinter, which at the present moment does duty as an ash-tray.

XVI

AT THE ANGLO-INDIAN AMBULANCE

March 1915.

As I arrive at the door of the school which had been turned into an ambulance, a motor-lorry is setting down some Indians who have been slightly wounded. One of them, a Sikh with a bronze-coloured face, is holding his right arm, which is bleeding, very cautiously. The pain makes him pull a wry face. As he passes by me, I say to him : "Chabash !"

This congratulatory formula possesses the virtue of magic. The face of bronze expands, and the Sikh passes majestically through the doorway like a wretched but

worthy pilgrim when he comes across the hospitable "fondouk" on his journey.

In the courtyard other "blacks" (that is what our Flemish peasants call the Indian soldiers) come and go with that elastic step which calls to mind the people one sees walking about in sandals in Oriental bazars. Notwithstanding the coolness of March, their shirt takes the place of a mantle and hangs loosely outside their breeches.

The M.O., who has the rank of lieutenant-colonel, is in his office. From living in India this little man, who is grey and rather fat, has grown somewhat like the placid pundit in turban and gold spectacles who does duty as a secretary. They are sitting close to one another, the colonel in an arm-chair and the pundit on a kitchen-chair.

"You've come to see your friend? He's much better. . . . Go alone, you know the way," the old man said to me kindly. . . .
"Is there no news from the front?"

He only breaks off from his work when he wishes to hurl some rather sharp words in Hindustani at the humble pundit. To be chief of an Anglo-Indian ambulance is not always an easy business. It is not enough to see that Indians and Europeans live together on good terms; it is also necessary to arrange billets in such a way that Brahmans and other fastidious people will not have to fear coming in contact with an inferior caste. Hence the hundreds of problems in connection with diet and sleeping which at times ruffle the colonel's ordinary satisfactory temper.

I leave him and go and visit my wounded man. In the little room adjoining the M.O.'s office I find the native attendant, Balcaland, a sort of Mongol with mild eyes and a man of importance. He knows English and is already a friend of mine. He receives me, smiling respectfully under his drooping moustache, and offers to escort me.

What I like about him is his mental curiosity combined with his extreme caution. The other day, for as a matter of fact I sometimes chat with him, he asked me at what period of the year the fever season begins in Flanders.

First of all we cross the native sick-room on tiptoe. Little iron beds marvellously clean run in a straight line on either side of the gangway in the centre, and in them dark heads emerge from purple rugs, bristling with untidy hair and exhaling an atmosphere of indolent beatitude. The serenity of the place is, no doubt, troubled by the hoarse sound of horrible expectorations, but this is merely some one with a cold who signifies his presence in this noisy way, as is customary in his country, and who, the moment after, composes himself and discourses peacefully with his neighbour. For these poor devils, who are disconcerted by a damp climate, this com-

fortable ambulance, on which the Sahibs lavish a wealth of attention, is a residence worthy of a rajah. From their submissive attitude the inference is that they would resign themselves without difficulty to the idea of spending the rest of their life there.

On the further side there is a corridor and then a staircase leading to the first floor. That is where MacKay, the Scotch attendant, another congenial spirit, is always to be found.

It does not matter what the temperature is, MacKay's arms are always bare, and he wears a kind of linen shirt which makes him look like an overgrown choir-boy. His expression, which remains imperturbably serious, always seems on the point of relaxing into a smile. Only once has he been known to get excited—in the morning, after a restless night, during which his bed-fellow who had celebrated some anniversary

or other "not wisely but too well," had forgotten the most elementary rules of propriety. MacKay took this accident as a personal offence, and waxed indignant when the M.O. did nothing more than laugh at it. Since that he has performed his duties in savage silence, the first of which is to place a thermometer night and morning between the teeth of each wounded man.

However, on the first floor Balcaland knocks at the door of the little room set apart for British officers, and I learn that I must wait a few minutes in the corridor as it is time for their wounds to be dressed. Balcaland keeps me company, and asks me suddenly :

"Why is France at war with Germany?"

He has, undoubtedly, been engrossed in this matter for a long while, for he looks at me eagerly and his black eyes burn with restrained passion.

I laugh and answer that neighbouring

peoples are doomed to quarrel about questions of territory, and that the truth of this is borne out by the case of Alsace-Lorraine; but my answer does not satisfy him.

“But it is Germany who has declared war,” he said to me, “and yet it is she who possesses Alsace-Lorraine.”

Then I endeavour to describe the intrigues of German imperialism, but he is called away and leaves me without having given up the secret of his meditations.

I am not alone for more than a moment, as two Indian attendants, with fewer stripes than Balcaland but not less solemn, make their appearance, in pointed turbans, at the end of the corridor. They advance gingerly so as not to make any noise. By bad luck the slippers provided by the Sirkar (Government) are made of fresh leather and creak with every step taken. I watch them pass by me, like two priests preparing to officiate. They stop finally in front of a cupboard, the door of

which they open partially ; they then exchange a few mysterious words in a whisper, and with a lazy nod one of them points to the sky, and the other at length makes up his mind, stretches out his arm, and with hierarchial reverence takes out a dusty vial containing a blackish liquid. They examine it together, consult again, and then put the vial back in exactly the same place. This is the end of the ceremony. They then separate gravely and apparently satisfied.

I am at length allowed to make my way into the chamber shared by a wounded French interpreter and an English officer. Hit by the same shell, they console one another over the injection of anti-tetanic serum which makes them suffer much more acutely, than the shell-splinters themselves.

"It is impossible to be better looked after than we are," declares the youngster. "The English doctors do spiffingly for me,

and then this ambulance is so jolly. Look! there's the 'handler-of-filth.' ”

He points to a rather dirty Indian who has just entered to rid the room of certain accessories of an intimate nature. This man, and those like him who belong to the lowest caste, are entrusted with all those duties which are calculated to soil a man. In order to have the right to carry up luncheon he must occupy a rank perceptibly higher in the Indian social scale. It is the very utmost possible if the “handler-of-filth” is allowed to take coal in his fingers in order to throw it on the fire. He is born in the familiarity of dirt, and in it he lives and dies.

“The best of it is,” adds my wounded friend with a laugh, “he finds it quite natural to be treated by others like a dog.”

The English officer joins in the conversation, and both of them relate their recent mishap afresh. They had had the extra-

ordinary notion of taking the air in the village of R—— just when it was being favoured with its daily bombardment at the hands of German artillery. Both heard the shell approach and crouched down at the same moment, whilst the English officer said calmly, "This one is for us."

In listening to them I admire the intimacy which has grown up between them owing to their common ordeal. They already call each other by their Christian names.

The shrill sounds of a harmonica are audible in the adjoining room.

"That's the English non-coms. who are giving us a concert," says the interpreter. "There's the Marseillaise. Presently we shall have a popular song from the halls— 'All the girls are pretty by the seaside.'"

Europe and its tavern-balls might be said to have just appeared unexpectedly in the heart of the East. Though the discord is glaring, nobody thinks of being surprised.

Prolonged habit has ended in allying them to one another—the Indian world to the Britannic world—and it even seems to me that the “handler-of-filth,” crouched in an attitude of fear in front of the fire, listens with secret pleasure to this awful accent which comes from the banks of the Thames.

Coming out from the room a little later, I meet a procession of convalescent natives going along the corridor in socks, well wrapped up in their scarlet rugs. In going downstairs they step aside so as not to brush against one of their own race, but an inferior, as is easily seen by what he is carrying in his hands. The pariah, however, is unmoved by this. He is, without doubt, just making off with a tin of preserves or jam from some corner, or perhaps he has picked up a half-eaten orange, for he is cheered by a piece of good luck, however unmentionable, and does not seem even to be

aware of public contempt. It is very true that the Sahibs know how to do things: they know how to spread the blessings of Science while prudently avoiding any interference with the social order that Destiny has willed.

XVII

ENGLISH COURAGE

March 1915.

WALLER, an English staff-officer, sends me a few words on a sheet of his notebook :

“ . . . try and not get killed, but if you are, upon my word ! it's best not to think of yourself. The chief thing to do is to beat these bandits, and we are going to manage it. . . . The other day I had rather an exciting time. A shell from the seventy-sevens came over the parapet and burst near me in the trench. Result : forty-three small splinters in the face, the drum of the left ear smashed, bruises on the left arm and shoulder, a hole in my boot and ankle, my tunic in shreds, also my

cap—yet here I am, more active than ever, and thinking very seriously of going away on leave. Yours ever.”

I can picture the scene : Waller, standing with his eye glued to the periscope, refusing to take into consideration a few wretched seventy-sevens, and confining himself to an oath or two during the commotion. Still, I doubt if he really enjoyed the amusement of which he writes. Of all the bravery I have ever known, Waller's is perhaps that which makes me feel the keenest admiration for the English character, because it does not exclude a frank horror of danger.

He had just arrived at the front, and as he was buttering a slice of bread, one day, in front of a bowl of strong tea, he said to me, with a smile :

“How one gets out of the habit of hearing firing ! I haven't heard the whistle of bullets since the South African War. Yesterday evening I ducked my head when

I was going along the road which skirts the trenches."

"The Germans were firing a good deal, then?"

"No; a bullet now and again; but one of them passed devilish near."

At the recollection of this he hung his head down, as if a mild shudder had gone through him. After this I looked at him with quite as much sympathy as curiosity. Although an officer by profession, this great boy with bright black eyes appeared to me like an amateur in the art of war. It was not that he was ignorant of his trade, nor that his attachment to it was only half-hearted—I have often had occasion to notice the accuracy of his technical knowledge—but this professional energy remained at all times, as it were, foreign to him. He was first and foremost a sportsman and a man of culture. If a piano was within reach, he could be seen rushing towards

the keyboard in a frenzied sort of way ; at table he displayed a pronounced taste for general topics. He seemed to me less military than many French officers of the reserve, who, when they don their uniforms, divest themselves entirely of the civilian ; Waller, on the contrary, was a gentleman in khaki.

And so war, for him, was only an exercise rather more dangerous than the rest. I saw him train at it gradually with as much facility as tenacity. He seized every opportunity to run to the trenches. Once there, he performed his duties calmly, without ever exposing himself uselessly or blushing to take cover when the place where he was became untenable, in which case he confined himself to saying to his companion of the moment, with a touch of temper : "I suppose we'd better wait a minute."

Then he would sit down on the firing-

step, leaning his back against the parapet and crossing his legs.

One day a novice went with him to the firing line, and the two men found themselves on an exposed road at the moment when, by curious bad luck, an enemy machine-gun took it into its head to fire in their direction. They were about two hundred yards from the next shelter. Considering it superfluous to alarm the other man, Waller coolly continued the conversation. It was only when they were under cover that he made known to him the danger they had just run, adding simply : " It was better not to lose one's head."

The best of it is that, even to-day, after many a month of war, this man, who does not know what fear is, confesses unaffectedly and without any false shame that the sensation of danger remains disagreeable to him. At a recent battle he was entrusted with an exceptionally perilous mission. He made

a preliminary reconnaissance which afforded him a foretaste of the risks he was about to run. I saw him before his final departure. He was a little more absorbed than ordinarily, but had breakfast with a good appetite. Suddenly he broke silence.

"It's beastly out there," he said to me. And smiling with a certain restraint, he added: "As I am not personally brave, I hate it."

I like this sincerity. The English speak of their fear as if it were a toothache, and, on that account, face death all the more bravely. Turenne, I fancy, would have commended them for it.

XVIII

MY FRIEND RAYMOND

April 1915.

WHAT distinguishes him, first and foremost, is his exceptional, not to say unique, slimness.

In the whole English cavalry I do not think there is a single officer who can rival him on this point. His face is composed of a tiny nose against which squeeze two sheep's eyes: the rest is mere vacancy. Two long skinny hands prolong his bony wrists, and on horseback his knees would come through his breeches if they were made by anybody else than Burberry. When, at the moment of going away, he takes up his position on the road, arms and legs apart, for the purpose of superintend-

ing the assembling of the convoy, he looks from a distance like a semaphore. Added to which, he is always frozen. Fond of draughts, like every Englishman, he drags all over the cantonment a perpetual cold which he is careful to keep going. When he coughs he seems to be giving up the ghost, and at such moments he slaps his chest and bows his head with the resignation of a dying man. At times an excess of rain and cold extracts a remark from him :

“I can’t quite make out why we English and French persist in defending this beastly country. Let’s give it up to the Germans straight away, it would be much better.”

He says these words slowly, and that is his second characteristic. Nothing in the world would induce him to hurry. Between each movement, each word and each syllable, some mysterious process goes on in him which retards the manifestation

of will or of thought. Finding himself, one day, at Boulogne, he looked long at the sea, and finished by saying : "I should like to go over to England." Then he set off again in his car with his companion. After travelling for an hour and a half, during which his remarks were few and far between, he asked from behind the cape of his cloak : "What is the fare?"

I admit that, to begin with, my judgment of him was not correct. This extraordinary phlegm appeared more tiring to me than curious. In it I saw a remnant of that British conceit, so rare nowadays, which has long been abominated by continental Europe. Must I admit that I went farther still? Raymond appeared to me as a poor man, feeble in mind and body, so true is it that an Englishman only unbosoms himself at the end of a long existence in common.

To-day we are old friends. Sometimes, without warning, he breaks silence for the

purpose of making a thrust at me, or to say, "Well! when do you think this cursed war's going to end?"

I discovered his bravery on the evening of the battle of Neuve-Chapelle. He had spent the day at the most exposed part of the line, smoking cigarettes under fire. When I saw him again his face was the same colour as his khaki mackintosh. He lighted his sixty-sixth cigarette, and when I questioned him, he answered simply: "I was never so afraid in my life."

However, this did not deter him from repeating what he had already done when the occasion again presented itself. Some time afterwards I met him on a road which the enemy had rather singled out. He was on horseback. Every one knows that this position is unpleasant when within range of the enemy's shells: in a motor you can get out of a tight corner by means of its pace; on foot you can take every advantage of

the ground ; but horses, on the contrary, owing to their slowness and their size, are doomed, together with their riders, to suffer the worst discomforts. Raymond, however, was trotting along as unconcerned as if he were in Rotten Row, his immaculate gloves and soft boots, which showed off the perpendicular outline of his calves, only adding to this illusion. I really believe he was smiling in his odd way at each shell-burst, as if to say, "That was not a bad one."

But what at last won me was his dry humour, which, more often than not, he indulged in at his own expense. You had to know him well in order to understand that his fun was not involuntary.

One day he took an interpreter with him to buy a pair of goloshes in the town. Long and laborious searches were made, and Raymond stood before a pile of them, in the middle of the shop, without expressing an opinion. Unable to stand it any

longer, the interpreter said, pointing to a pair: "I think these will fit you."

Raymond put them on slowly, and then looked at his feet as though noticing their dimensions for the first time. At last he declared: "You are right, these fit me perfectly." The interpreter was already jubilant over his victory, when Raymond went on: "Don't you think that this other pair will fit me better?"

The goloshes which he referred to were the same shape and the same size as the others, as was pointed out to him, with all the clearness that one could desire, by the wretched interpreter.

"Never mind," said Raymond, "I think it would be better to try on this pair as well."

He took several minutes to change them, after which he began examining his feet again.

"You are quite right," he declared with satisfaction, "this other pair is exactly

similar to the first." This time the interpreter was on the point of triumphing when Raymond, observing his impatience, continued to reflect.

"So I'm going to take the first pair," he declared, and did what he said.

One evening after dinner the conversation turned on the best London tradesmen. An officer, extremely pleased with his own elegance, was extolling the merits of a bootmaker called Smith. Thereupon a voice came from the depth of an easy-chair in which, in the twilight, only two pointed knees were visible. "Smith is the best bootmaker in London, only I can't go to him because I owe him sixty pounds."

This remark passed unperceived, and the smart officer proceeded to eulogise a hatter named Brown. "Brown," went on the voice, "is the best hatter in London, only I can't go to him because I owe him forty pounds."

After Brown's turn came Jones's, the tailor. "Jones," the voice still went on, "is the best tailor in London, only I can't go to him because I owe him eighty pounds."

The whole evening Raymond went the round of London and his debts in this fashion. Moreover, it was impossible to tell whether he was speaking the truth or whether he was making fun in his own particular way of the other man's pretensions.

His phlegm is at its best in emergencies. One night he was awakened in the middle of a pleasant dream by a strong smell of smoke. For a long while he hesitated between his desire to go on with his dream and the duty of exposing himself to the cold in order to make sure about the cause of this smell. At length he got up and put on a dressing-gown of Indian design with great care, then he opened his door and was almost suffocated. The farther end of the corridor, which was over the room where

the orderlies go and warm themselves, was in flames.

Raymond uttered his favourite exclamation, "Well!" Then, remembering that he ought to wake the three or four officers who slept on the same floor, he made his way through smoke which was becoming thicker and thicker, knocking at their doors and calling them in a quiet voice, like a man who comes and borrows your matches. In a little while the whole house was afoot. Some came down half-dressed, others threw their bags out of the windows; the orderlies, in their bewilderment, ran here, there, and everywhere; one officer, with more foresight than the others, even ordered the lamps of the car to be lit so as to be ready to take flight.

But what was Raymond doing? Having meditated over the seriousness of the fire, and realising, no doubt, that in his Indian dressing-gown he would have been hindered from

carrying buckets of water, he went gravely down to the kitchen. In his strange apparel, which heightened his skinniness, he would have reminded people of some spectre rising from the tomb for a dance of death. The cook, in a fright, had already reached the door when Raymond detained him with an authoritative gesture. "Make some coffee," he commanded ; and as the cook was inclined to take him for a madman, he added with apparent indignation : "Make some coffee, I tell you ! If we have to get up in the middle of the night in cold weather like this, it's the least we can do to get something warm into our stomachs."

XIX

THROUGH YPRES

April—May 1915.

WHAT was the length of that infernal road? I only knew afterwards when I looked at the map and ascertained with astonishment that a motor going at a moderate pace could do the journey in less than ten minutes. Had these ten minutes seemed long or short? I could not tell, for between those two walls of steel we were living out of time.

On the first occasion, we ran the risk without inordinate apprehension. "Others have passed, so why not I?" But to begin the adventure all over again after what we had seen! That was quite another thing. Everywhere else on the roads bombarded

by the enemy the blackest crumps are obedient to the laws of geography. We know when and where to be on our guard. But in this unavoidable winding defile shells, singly or in groups, fell at every moment, bursting above or below you at the caprice of chance, so that when entering this slaughter-house our courage sometimes failed us, and we used to say to ourselves, "What's the good of going there without being sent by some imperative command? Am I going to get killed for the pleasure of proving to my own satisfaction that I'm brave?" etc. We had to steel ourselves, and copy the diver who throws himself into the water with his eyes shut.

We are off. It is eleven o'clock, a bad hour, because it follows the awakening of the heavy artillery, and because munitions are then abundant and shells arrive in volleys. At first I really believe we joked,

but in a few moments we have passed through the inhabited districts where, in the absence of civilians, Tommies are standing idly on the doorsteps, and have reached the turning where the danger begins. From this point all is emptiness, that special emptiness of houses and roads which at once reveals the invisible presence of shells.

The words we exchange grow briefer. Five hundred yards in front of us, at the end of an avenue bordered with trees, is the bridge which the fifteens and the twenty-ones have tried to find for more than a week. I look at that only, and hardly notice a convoy which has started off at full trot. As we pass it we drive over the bough of a tree which was not there yesterday. The remains a little farther on must be those of an ammunition-wagon. No matter. I see nothing but the bridge. It stands out in the sunshine. The smoke of the last shell has disappeared, so the next cannot be long

in coming. A slackening of speed, two dips, and we are over, but I notice that I bent my back and put my shoulders up as one does under a douche of cold water.

On the other side stretches the ruinous suburb where I lost myself the first day. At the second turning I went to the right instead of to the left, and suddenly I found myself in the middle of a street no longer dotted even with the dead bodies of horses, in a lonely place of gaping walls and pierced roofs. Now I know my way, and I know also that, between the first and second turnings, the ascending street, torn up and encumbered by ruins, is in the very line of the enemy batteries. Vehicles pass so swiftly at this place that the dead horse, stretched out in the street two days ago, has no head.

We are in the thick of it. Judging by the uproar, the bombardment is at its height. Yet I see no smoke, neither level with the ground nor between the roofs. I

should be quite ready to believe that nothing has fallen here for more than a quarter of an hour but for the discovery of two stretcher-bearers behind a pile of bricks, who have just put down their blood-stained burden, and one of whom asks, with a parched throat, where the ambulance is. Farther on, beyond the second turning, an officer on horseback stops and looks for his way with such evident anxiety that I have no more illusions as to what has occurred in this place a few seconds before I pass. I show him the way and go on.

Outside the suburb there commences a network of roads. When soldiers have to walk along them they keep close to the ditches. The bark of the trees on both sides of the road shows white scars. Although I hear the dull burstings of shells and the rattle made by the hundred and fives firing, I continue vainly to examine the surroundings. Never anything, never any visible

sign to guide one ; on the contrary, this apparent peace ends in disconcerting you. You are like a pilot trying to find the direction of the wind in the middle of a tempest.

The truth suddenly dawns on me. Two hundred yards from here I usually take a cross-cut in order to avoid the village, which is perched on a hill, and sprinkled methodically from morning till night by the heavy artillery. To-day, however, my short-cut is not very "healthy." Between the houses which line it I discover an almost unbroken belt of big yellowish clouds : that, then, is the centre of the hurricane. It would be better to go through the village. However, I shall have to thread my way through this cloud of smoke in order to reach the report centre.

So we go up to the village and pass the ruins at full speed. The same silence and the same strange impression of peace are here as in the suburb, as if the enemy

had no further interest in these heaps of tumbled bricks now that his work of devastation is accomplished. We are now going down on the other side, the fields on our right being all the time furiously hammered with shrapnel. We penetrate into the bombarded zone, but as we have only a few hundred yards to go the danger already seems less. One more turning. Nothing overhead, and over there lie two dead horses, one killed some time ago, the other recently ; one in a violet, the other in a red, pool. Two wounded men pass us ; a woman also, with her arm stained with blood. We reach our goal ; the motor draws up, and a sentinel cries out to us to take cover. A minute later, after crunching over broken bits of glass alongside of a house, I have a momentary sensation of safety at the bottom of a dug-out.

Why does the return journey always seem

easier? As soon as you take the road back you get the false impression that there are no more risks to be run. And yet the place where crumps fall thickest is not always near the firing-line.

My chauffeur and I make up our minds that the bombardment of our usual road has slackened a good deal, and that there is no reason now to go round by the village. But we have hardly covered two or three hundred yards of our favourite short-cut when a shell overtakes and passes us and bursts a few paces in front of us. What luck! we have time to pass before the next arrives. The motor darts between houses, still inhabited the day before, but now empty. Even stretcher-bearers, however fearless, do not venture into this area at the present moment. But we are well on our way and quite confident. Something has burst again not far from us, but my instinct tells me that it is not for us.

After the houses come some fields. Convoy-wagons and horses were taking shelter here only yesterday behind some buildings. Now nothing remains but an artillery-wagon, the wheel of which is broken. The shells a little while ago have made a clean sweep.

As we approach the suburb I notice two small white clouds the other side of the roofs above the sloping street. This time no mistake is possible: the seventy-sevens have begun to bar the way again. The nuisance is we are still too far from the danger zone to be sure of crossing it before the next volley. At any rate the entry into the suburb is not favourable for a halt: it is too well known to shrapnel! We decide to risk it. The extraordinary thing is, I have less apprehension in the presence of this real danger than half an hour earlier in the face of the unknown.

A dog which has lost its way wanders

across the road. From habit my chauffeur slows down and avoids it.

"Now, we're in hell," he says to me, as we warily enter the death-trap.

At the same moment a clap of thunder breaks above us. The shrapnel must have burst too high, twenty yards in the air, and I am at once certain that neither he nor I have been hit. My companion has not moved an eyelash, nevertheless I ask him if anything is the matter.

"Nothing."

"That's all right; come along!"

We graze the horse without a head, and it seems to me that its neck has diminished still more in length. On the other side, near a house, an English motor-cyclist lies stretched out on the ground, his face grey, and his forehead covered with blood. In order to die the poor fellow has put his head on a block of stone. He must have been killed a few moments before.

One more trial, a convoy of artillery bars the entry to the bridge. We have to stop and wait. Luckily at that moment the seventy-sevens are firing too high. The way is, at last, clear, and with a bound we are on the other side. In the avenue, some branches, recently broken off, tell us that we are not yet out of the battered zone. But having accomplished the hardest part, this that remains seems child's-play.

The last turning is passed, and we now consider ourselves in safety. An extraordinary joy comes over us, a boyish kind of joy, blent with pride and an unreasoned belief in our luck. After this I feel invulnerable. As I have not been hit this time it seems to me that a superior power stands in the way of my ever being hit, and I would undertake the most perilous errand without concern.

My chauffeur, who is by no means a braggart, translates the same sensation by this amazing bit of boasting :

“For my part, I am capable of going wherever you like with the car, right up to the trenches of the Boches, if you wish it. If I must die, I’ll die. What does it matter to me . . . !”

XX

A FRENCH GENERAL

May 1915.

FOR the purpose of directing the fighting the general has stationed himself in a wretched hovel with one storey which would be destroyed by a single blow from the slightest shell of any size. It was very necessary to go there, as the farm which the divisional staff had at first made its headquarters had been reduced to powder the very first morning. A piece of water runs round the house, the trees of the garden afford some shade, and, up to now, the guns of the enemy have only bombarded it in a casual way. It is, in fact, an oasis.

Sometimes the general goes over the ground on his rounds of inspection. He

then walks at a quick pace accompanied by a staff officer, and is to be seen disappearing behind a curtain of crumps in the direction of one of his brigades. But he spends the greater part of the day and the whole of the night in the house. While the telephone is ringing violently inside he usually sits in a kitchen-chair on the doorstep, like a villager taking the air on Sunday. When shells are coming near, the chair is taken behind the house to the edge of the water, and he walks there slowly, leaning on his stick, so as not to spoil the enjoyment of a fine day by hurrying uselessly.

This morning the air is fresh, but the sun caresses the garden. Having given all his orders, the general comes and chats with us at the door. The ends of his grey moustache reach very nearly to his thick soldier's cloak. His cap, tipped over his ear, gives rather a sly expression to his observant eyes. He speaks slowly and does not once break

off, even when the battery close by splutters violently or when an ominous whistling makes the most hardened warrior prick up his ears.

"The business of general," he explains, "has become commonplace. Formerly we were strategists, but now we confine ourselves to preparing an attack in the same way as you wind up the spring of a toy with a key. When we have done that, we have nothing more to do than to let go and wait for the result."

Around us, men come and go with that somewhat feverish activity which revives on days when great attacks are to be launched. A motor-cyclist, covered with dust, jumps off his machine with an envelope in his hand ; staff-officers go in and out ; others, unable to check their impatience, make for the end of the garden and search the horizon with their glasses ; in the corridor behind us, three telephones are working

uninterruptedly. You feel that the minds and wills of all are straining towards the plain where the infantry are lying prone, waiting to rush forward again.

Only the general seems free of all anxiety, secret or otherwise. The moment when everybody's nerves are strained to breaking-point is precisely the one he chooses for conversing with us seriously on the Balkan question. A calmness deceptive or forced, you will say. It is quite possible. Or perhaps our generals have tried to imitate the great chief. What is certain is that their serenity, real or apparent, ends by being infectious. A general in Joffre's army is not a man to make a fuss. He is a quiet mathematician who calculates coolly, a few yards from the line of fire and within range of the enemy's shells. It is enough to see him to say to oneself immediately: "He is right ; I was wrong to get excited."

However, the chief of the staff is looking

for him in order to submit some new problem. A little later on I find them in a sort of ante-room adjoining the kitchen, sitting at a table on which a map is spread out. Without haste, but also without hesitation, the general has just given some complementary orders. The mathematician has found the solution.

At this moment a shell bursts in the kitchen with a noise of broken glass windows. The door opens and a man comes out running; behind him there is a thick smoke in which human forms are struggling; a wounded man with his head dangling down is carried in.

"You cannot remain here, General," says the chief of the staff, getting up.

The general looks and hesitates; he is in no hurry.

"The shell must have burst outside. It's only shrapnel. Do you really think I ought——"

However, he decides to follow his chief of staff. We have now assembled at the back of the house. The shelter afforded us by the wretched hovel is only relatively safe, and besides, one badly-aimed shell would be sufficient to take us in the rear. As bad luck will have it, the enemy is suddenly aware of the presence of the house and garden in an area where no residence has a right to remain standing. Volleys of shells encircle us, and the bough of a tree in the garden breaks off with a crack.

“Is the cook badly wounded?” the general asks.

Reassuring news is given him. He remains a few minutes with us, lifting his head now and again in order to watch the storm approach. But soon this inaction annoys him. He has some urgent questions to settle, and so he leads one of his officers to the garden, which is now an

exposed spot, in order to give him some instructions. Their conversation lasts some time. With the end of his stick the general makes some sketches in the sand, just as a country squire might do in discussing some plans with his architect on a peaceful spring day.

But the bombardment begins again and redoubles in violence. This time some débris falls on our caps; on the other side of the water, twenty yards away from us, the earth is tossed up in masses.

“They are sending us some big ones,” mutters an artillery officer; “we are in for it!”

The staff decides to take advantage of the next lull in order to make a second move. Four hundred yards from here is a villa which has the reputation of receiving the attentions of only the seventy-sevens. It will be a convenient place of refuge until it is destroyed in its turn. The general gives

his consent. "Here," he says, "nobody can work quietly."

We leave in small parties, so as not to attract attention. When the general's turn comes, he moves off through the garden at walking pace with his chief of staff. The other end of the garden is by no means "healthy" ; the tall trees, no doubt, serve as a guiding-mark for the enemy batteries. For the first time the general seems to appreciate the charm of this forest. Staying behind, I see him stop, look round about him, and point with his everlasting stick to the branches which have been injured. He is at ease ; he is at home.

XXI

THE PLEASANT BILLET

May 1915.

I HAD to take an order to a group of English batteries posted four or five hundred yards behind l'Yperlée, and working by the side of our seventy-fives. I found the commandant of the party, a major, sitting in a chair in a corner of a barn with his legs crossed, his gloved hand resting on his cane, and his monocle in his eye. Why had the enemy artillery neglected to blow on this house of cards, when the tiles of the neighbouring farm had already been puffed away like so many feathers? The major never put this question to himself. He was there as though at his club.

I was introduced forthwith to a tall lad

with an open face, who went backwards and forwards from the barn to the guns, without condescending to put a cap on his black, curly hair. Two lieutenant's stars were on a sleeve too short for his arm. He shook me briskly by the hand, and said to me at once :

“Have tea !”

I followed him to his billet. That is what he called the house where he was quartered with the other officers of the battery, a few steps from the barn. As we walked along I took stock of him. His vigorous head thrown back, and his free movements, proclaimed the globe-trotter far more than the camp man. He recalled those rough and ready engineers who bore through the Cordilleras of the Andes, and in the intervals of their business engage in the pastime of shooting brigands.

“We've got a stunning billet here,” he said to me, laughing. However, it was nothing more than an extremely modest

dwelling, the dilapidated walls of which seemed to be of doubtful equilibrium, the residence of a well-to-do farmer, old but of no particular style, and affording, one would think, very doubtful comfort. The mess-room—the room which they had turned into their mess—was furnished with two beds and a round table. As soon as I entered I noticed a yawning hollow which opened in the wall over the chimney-piece.

The lieutenant explained the origin of it to me with amusement. “A six-inch shell came through there the day before yesterday and fell on the bed without bursting. One of us was having a nap, but he was not touched.” He added that from that day the house had not been threatened by a single projectile. Neither he nor any of his friends attached the slightest importance to the incident.

Two or three of them were at table in front of the traditional tea. I was casually

told their names, which I immediately forgot. What remains vividly impressed on my memory is the beaming good grace of these merry fellows. Why do the English pass for being silent and reserved? Very often they are quite the reverse. The oldest of my hosts was, perhaps, not five-and-twenty. I felt at once at my ease; my impression was the same as a mountaineer's in fraternising with a troop of venturesome travellers during a perilous ascent.

Neither jam nor butter was wanting, nor any of those cakes which are forwarded each week by the young ladies of England or Scotland. The fact which stood out from their conversation was that their present quarters appeared to them a sort of earthly paradise.

"Here," the lieutenant declared, "all of us have beds." He related, with laughter, that in the dug-out where he had been quartered until recently, mice used to wake him up

in the night by running over his face. One morning, as he was shaving, a shell very nearly buried him. Another, whose eyes appeared pure blue against his extremely sun-burnt skin, spoke of an experience more singular still.

“The other day, I was still at Hill X, you know, the one we took recently. Since a counter-attack was feared, it had been decided, if need be, to sacrifice one cannon. All alone I took up my position in a ruin two hundred yards off, and almost on the same level as the first-line trench. In case the Germans should regain a footing there I was ordered to take the position in enfilade fire. My gun would certainly have done good execution, but you may be sure that I should have been quickly discovered. It was not all beer and skittles. I lay down in the ruins. On account of the bullets it was impossible to move so as to get warm, and all the time I was expecting their counter-attack.”

Lighting a Virginian cigarette, he added, 'We have never been better quartered than here. We even have sheets, and then the battery is too well concealed behind the hedge for them to manage to 'spot' it.'

Others made the like reflections—none of them was what we call a milksop. They were capable of sleeping on the ground or of exposing themselves to shot and shell in the English fashion, that is to say, without real enjoyment, but also without flinching. But that only made them relish comparative comfort all the more. This wretched hole of a dwelling which, no doubt, a shell might demolish from minute to minute, this hovel through which the wind blew free, was home for them—home where the morning ablutions are performed away from the inclemencies of the elements, where *The Sketch* and a box of cigarettes lie on the mess-table, where the smoke from their pipes remains imprisoned under the ceiling,

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where they are comfortable in the evening when they want to write long letters to their sweethearts. After months of struggling against mud on foreign soil they had discovered a refuge where their hearts could expand.

The conversation was cordial. They joked about the German emperor, Kaiser Bill; next they praised "Old Joffre," K. (Kitchener), and the Soixante-quinzes. They had also a kind word for the Grand Duke Nicholas. We asked one another for news, only to find out that we knew nothing; which, however, did not stop us from exchanging prophecies as to the probable duration of the war. We were in such good spirits that the maddest of us imagined that all would be finished before Christmas. "This game," he said, "can't go on for ever. The Germans will end by having enough of it."

In conclusion they conversed with me,

with lively satisfaction, about the last Zeppelin raid on England. According to them no event could be more fortunate, the old country needing to be waked up.

When I went away the tall lieutenant, still bareheaded, said to me, as he conducted me to the door : " Above all, don't tell any one of our billet. We're afraid that some general will come and take it."

I had no difficulty in keeping it secret. The very next day the enemy artillery took it into its head to destroy their palace. Flashes from their batteries firing by night must have revealed their presence, unless the Germans had quite simply availed themselves of the opportunity to empty their ammunition - wagons before the time for refilling. I pitied my friends heartily, but this is what I saw the same evening.

The sun was setting. The heavy German artillery was indulging in an *evening hate*, that is to say, it was squandering its shells

with a rage worthy of Polyphemus. The grey or black clouds rising from the explosions hid whole fields, and ruddy lights from fires began to tinge the horizon blood-red. In a calm little plot in the middle of this tempest, the major with his monocle had caused a table to be spread in the open air and was dining with two or three officers. The smallest German caprice would have been enough to disturb them—but he had, no doubt, said to himself that the German artilleryman is conservative by temperament. So the orderly brought out the dishes without the slightest haste, as though for a picnic. The major did not even turn his head when the uproar seemed to be coming nearer and nearer. He looked as if he were enjoying the peace of a beautiful twilight in complete serenity.

XXII

THE SOIXANTE-QUINZE

May 1915.

Two or three hundred yards from the report centre, where I happen to be with the colonel of the artillery and his staff, stretch some farms connected with one another by live hedges. A small lane separates us and them, running straight to the line of fire. Yesterday, in the thick of the fight, I saw some motor-ambulances pass this way, moving under shell-fire at their ordinary quiet pace. If the enemy artillery has for a long time bombarded the lane, it has not yet thought of searching the farms. And yet it is just there that a dozen soixante-quinzes are ensconced.

I love watching them fire. Nothing

reveals their presence but intermittent flashes, which turn the hedge into a burning bush. Nevertheless, what is going on there can easily be imagined : a few yards to the rear of the battery the officer is bending down over the hole which acts as a shelter for the telephone operator squatting there, while near the cannon the party of gunners, huddled together, is kneeling down in front of the open ammunition wagon, or else sitting on the two seats, all silent and intent on their work ; finally, the cannon themselves, alive and slipping along on the carriages with the litheness of animals.

Sometimes the batteries keep silence for a long time together. You wonder then if they have not, by chance, noiselessly slipped away in order to throw themselves on some other scent. But the pack soon gives tongue again, and you think, not without satisfaction, of the Boches in those

trenches over there which they have caught under their fire by surprise, who, in the words of a famous artilleryman, "are flying high."

"To-night," said a lieutenant to me, "the Germans have received artillery reinforcements." And he points to a thick column of smoke on the horizon where a farm or a château is burning. Nearer us the dull burstings of big shells are more frequent than yesterday morning. A sharp wind is blowing, and as each projectile goes by there is a noise of ripping canvas in the air. The *soixante-quinzes* were put to bed late last night, and are sleeping it out on the other side of the hedge.

"The annoying part about firing at night," the lieutenant says, "is that the flashes are liable to cause you to be spotted."

As if to confirm what he was saying, the arrival of a volley is announced by angry hissings. The sound has not ceased when

we perceive the clouds caused by the explosions the other side of the lane above a fallow field : big, bulging clouds of a dull yellowish colour, like purulent abscesses.

The lieutenant looks at them with the eye of a connoisseur—hundred-and-five's. They burst at a good height, but the Germans haven't either the right sight or the direction. Our men must be awfully amused at them. First one flash in the hedge, and then another and another, and immediately afterwards we hear four sharp bangs from the first battery, the opening bar of a French symphony to which all of us have listened many a time these ten months with delight, and which we are unlikely to forget even should we live a hundred years : a music clear and rhythmical, the classic regularity of which even the most furious tornado of the Germans has never succeeded in disturbing ; a music of great power, also, when played in unison

with the same crashing bravoura by a formidable orchestra.

Silence. The two adversaries seem to have renounced their morning duel. Our batteries slumber again. The Germans, however, have an idea of their own. Soon the whizzing begins again, and gusts of shells above the deserted field persist with the obstinacy of a madman. Below, clouds from explosions, and little sprays of earth from which a black smoke issues, reveal the point where the crumps are falling.

The good French mould is indifferent to the Teutonic fury let loose by the enemy. But the *soixante-quinzes*, in their turn, grow angry, and answer each volley as if to defy the enemy's big guns, and to say, "You great idiots! don't you see that you're not aiming straight?"

I look at my lieutenant. He gnaws his moustache, and says, "They're coming closer."

The shells were, in fact, slowly changing their trajectory in the direction of the hedge where our cannons were in hiding. The enemy is evidently searching the whole ground, in which case it is to be feared that in the end he will gain his objective. A fresh volley arrives, and, from the point from which we are observing, it seems to us that it has fallen twenty yards short of the first battery.

“Those cursed flashes of yesterday evening have given them away,” whispers the lieutenant, “and the worst of it is they haven’t had time yet to construct any shelters.”

The soixante-quinzes reply insolently, in the teeth of these last shells. Nevertheless, my uneasiness increases. Will they manage to silence the enemy’s fire in time?

Several of us are looking on. At this short distance our glasses are useless. We

say nothing, but think, each one of us, of the brave men now engaged in deadly earnest.

Another silence, almost unbearable, of one or two minutes, and then another crash. This time there is no doubt about it, they have been hit ; shells have burst five paces in front of the hedge. At the same moment four flashes from our guns pierce the enemy's smoke, and we breathe again.

"Our men have got some pluck," says the lieutenant. "As long as one of them remains the cannons will fire."

He is interrupted by the noise of a volcanic eruption. The enemy volley has scored a bull's-eye. When the smoke clears off, the roof of the farm in the battery's rear appears stripped of its tiles, and reduced to the condition of a skeleton. The high explosives, also, must have done some damage. Our men have been caught under their fire, and some of them must already have fallen.

This time the soixante-quinzes will be silenced.

But not a bit of it! Four more flashes have just come from the battery at which the enemy's fire is directed, and, to jeer at him the more, it redoubles its efforts. They must be mad! I want to shout out to these men to cease firing and to take cover.

And here are the crumps coming back, more numerous, more violent, and better aimed than a little while ago. They give me the impression of having smashed our battery. The lieutenant and the colonel say nothing: I can imagine their anxiety. This time the soixante-quinzes give no answer, and the enemy, sure of his conquest, gores them with shells, like a bull finishing off his victim. The nearest farm is nothing more than a skimmer, and a deep gash shows in the hedge itself. All is over, then, and I picture the scene to myself:

I can see our poor fellows lying stretched out beside their cannon, now all in pieces, their faces calm to the last, and the wounds of the survivors who are dragging themselves painfully to the nearest ditch.

Silence. The Germans are not firing any more. The colonel summons the connecting file, a smiling little artilleryman, and orders him to go for news. He salutes and moves off. I find it difficult to overcome my despondency. I feel as if defeated, and as if our cannons, so elegant and so fragile, will never be able to stand against the formidable heavy artillery of the barbarians.

But what is that? What is happening now? Has the same battery really begun to fire again? I discover some distinguishing marks which establish the fact beyond doubt. The little cannons have come to life again, and reply with so much vigour that it seems as if the shower of explosives has given them renewed activity. These are

not volleys, but a destructive firing, a hail of twenty rounds a minute, which makes steel crumble up like men. The astonished Germans must believe that they were mistaken a little while ago. They reply, but this time their shells fall far from the batteries, and then, in their turn, they cease answering.

The little connecting file, with his cap over his ear, has now returned.

"They haven't done badly," he said quietly ; "only two men wounded, luckily, and they've spotted the Boche battery."

The lieutenant, in a friendly way, puts some questions to him, and he adds :

"It was most amusing. I remained five minutes watching them fire."

XXIII

WOUNDED ZOUAVES

May, 1915.

A SMALL station in the neighbourhood of our lines. On the platform, the other side of the barrier, a score or so of wounded are walking with tiny steps, waiting for the hospital train to start. Among them are a few indolent Turcos, some soldiers of the line (whose sky-blue cloaks, perpetually unbuttoned, are already turning grey), and, last, but not least, some Zouaves, yellow from the chechia to the feet, except for the dash of red which the crimson braid of their collars give them. A disc hangs on their chests, and they look as if they are peacefully waiting in the weighing-paddock for the race to begin.

Two of these Zouaves have come towards the barrier on which I am leaning. One, with his left arm in a sling, has a small red moustache, and one of those little curly beards which go by the name of "goatee." The other wears a white linen cap under his chechia. His weather-beaten face, the face of a carman or of a stevedore, shows him to be in the neighbourhood of forty. They chat like peasants, without animation and without affectation.

Myself: "Then you were with us at Charleroi?"

"Yes," answers the Zouave with the goatee, "the rest of us were at Tarcienne defending the village. Good heavens! the things we had to put up with. Crumps and shrapnel all day, and bullets at night. They simply poured down, I can tell you! Besides, the effect was all the greater as it was the first time that we had experienced them."

Myself : "Your company must have suffered badly that day."

The same Zouave : "No ; in my company we had all belonged to the old 'third,' and so we knew what to do. We hardly lost ten men."

The Zouave with the broken head : "I, also, have been through the whole campaign. This is the third time I've been wounded, so I begin to think that the Boches will never have my skin."

All of which was stated with the assurance of a man for whom the whole course of being wounded, taken to hospital, and of passing from the hospital to the dépôt and from there to the front, has become a normal periodical routine, of which there is no reason to complain.

The Zouave with the goatee, after brief meditation : "In these blooming parts, it is all one to us. Good gracious ! how we catch it ! First we had crumps and bombs,

and now we have gas. In the early days, when there were no masks, these cursed things stifled you ; it was impossible to hold out, there was nothing for it but to run away. Those who came out of it alive vomited for days and days. The whole of one of our companies was left dead on the field. You see, we don't like running away."

The Zouave with the broken head : "It's just the same with us. I do believe that the other day half the battalion were lost in the first assault. We were already in their trenches, and were creeping along their communication trench like tigers, when that stench made its appearance. We wept, we coughed, and some of us were at the last gasp. We lost a few that day, I can tell you !"

The Zouave with the goatee : "My battalion has been just as roughly handled as yours. Owing to their machine-guns we were not able to debouch the other day.

As soon as you raised your head above the parapet you found yourself on your back." (The two Zouaves make an attempt to demonstrate the enormous number of the losses suffered by their respective battalions. To hear them speak you would be convinced that nothing is left of the French army. However, before long the tone of the conversation changes.)

The Zouave with the goatee : "Notwithstanding all that, the Boches where we were suffered more than we did. Good gracious ! Those beasts didn't half get it that day ! We popped out of our holes before the soixante-quinzes had stopped firing. We leapt into their first-line trench before they had time to turn round, and worked our way along at the point of the bayonet. On that occasion two lines of trenches were taken. They called out, 'Kamarad, kamarad !' They had had about enough of it."

The Zouave with the broken head, smiling feebly : " We did a good job too. To reach them we had to climb up a glaxis, which was hard, but we managed to do it all the same. I must say the soixante-quinzes had got hold of them finely : you could see them blown up in the air. When we got to them half the trench was full of human remains, a really loathsome sight. The rest put up their arms. They were all young, and looked like lads of fourteen. We knocked them down with the butt-ends of our rifles. What could they expect ? We've been caught too often, so we think twice about it before taking any prisoners. I myself have had a narrow escape of being killed by a Boche officer who pretended to surrender ; since then the squad has taken nothing more than a sample or two."

Myself : " Really ! You weren't choked that day by gas ? "

The Zouave with the broken head :
“ With masks your eyes still smart, but you get out of it somehow. (*Confidentially*) A relation of mine at Vincennes informs me that we are going to use turpinité. It’s not a day too soon.”

The Zouave with the goatee : “ The Boches will get ‘ what for.’ Besides, it’s quite clear that they’re afraid of the Zouaves.”

The Zouave with the broken head :
“ Quite clear ! ”

They expressed this conviction with quiet assurance. If they were proud of their own losses, they were prouder still of those inflicted on the enemy and of their moral prestige. We continued our chat. The Zouave with the fractured skull prefers bullets to shells, because a single shell is capable of killing ten men ; but his companion is of the opposite opinion, because bullets come without giving warning. Neither one nor the other seem inconvenienced by their wounds.

Myself : " Do you suffer now ? "

The Zouave with the goatee (making rather a face) : " Yes, a lot. I've a finger torn by shrapnel."

Myself : " And you ? "

The Zouave with the broken head (pointing to the back of his head) : " I had the skin of my skull torn back over my face by a shell-splinter, and the skull itself fractured. I have also a ringing sound all the time in my ears."

At this moment a regimental doctor comes towards us and intimates in a rough voice to the two wounded that they must stop all conversation with the public. The Zouaves move lazily off.

XXIV

THE QUAKER

June 1915.

IT is written: "Thou shalt not kill." This is why Stone, who is a Quaker, enlisted in the motor-transport section. In this fashion he served his country in a righteous war without rendering himself liable to commit the ghastly sin of homicide. His upbringing and his means would have warranted a higher ambition. But, being the slave of his conscience, he stoically accepted a modest position and the society of men whom he considered coarse.

His appearance was that of a bald head on the top of a pillar. God seemed to have given him a body for the sole purpose of lifting his thoughts above the baseness of this world. And so his slightest movement

gave the impression of a victory gained by mind over matter. When he was driving he held himself, on every occasion, as stiffly as a parson in the pulpit. Nobody ever saw him laugh.

One morning, being off duty, he took it into his head to take a stroll in order to admire the Creator in His works. The staff were then quartered in a house with a park attached. Leaving the coach-house where the cars were fraternising with the horses, Stone set off with his Bible under his arm, and walked resolutely across the lawn, which the spring had made fresh again. The "glorious" weather filled him with a simple joy. The sparrows which hopped about on the grass consoled him by their innocence for the improper conversation, the preceding evening, of his immediate superior, Sergeant-Major Hewlett, who was often the worse for drink.

He was just about to sit down and open

his Bible when, at the bend of an avenue, a stray horse suddenly came in sight. Without losing a minute, the voice of duty spoke to Stone, who happened to be a member of a society for prevention of cruelty to animals. Coming close to the beast, he stroked it gently, and, giving up his idea of a walk, he led it back personally to the stables. In passing by the trough the horse pulled at his halter, so Stone made it drink, his Bible still in his hand.

“Poor brute!” he murmured compassionately, as he saw the quivering flanks of his protégé. The groom responsible was a certain Baker, whose morals, for a long time, had inspired him with just indignation. Wherever his quarters, Baker always left a sweetheart behind him.

“If I liked I could report you to the major,” Stone said to him. “I hope this lesson will be sufficient. This poor beast, which you neglect, is worth more than you.”

He walked solemnly away, without paying attention to the chuckles of Baker, the obstinacy of whose character was pretty well indicated by the squareness and prominence of his chin. Not long afterwards the same horse was found straying a second time. This time Stone addressed Baker harshly : "Child of Satan," he said to him (or words to that effect), "you are at liberty to lose your own soul, but, at least, don't let your sins fall on this poor innocent beast. You rascal, see how anxious and troubled it is. I'm sure you are brutal to it, like the brute that you are. Once again, damn your own soul, if you like, but take care of the horse ; if not, you'll have me to deal with."

From this day forward, Stone believed himself entrusted by Providence with a special mission—namely, to watch over the unlucky quadruped. If, in his eyes, men were not worthy of much esteem by reason

of their sins, animals, on the contrary, were deserving of infinite pity. And so the exigencies of a tiring job did not prevent him from keeping his promise to God. Some nights he would get out of the car where he was curled up asleep to make sure that Baker's horse was not being kicked. At times this zeal bore fruit. Feeling that he was observed, and, in his meanness, dreading denunciation, the groom took trouble to avoid being caught. He confined himself to taking vengeance on Stone in an underhand way. Thus the Quaker remarked the disappearance of a superb Stilton which he had hidden in the box in his motor, and which was destined for his own personal use : the most virtuous of men have their little weaknesses.

However, before long, the division was torn from this comparative repose and thrown into one of those furnaces which blaze up from time to time at some point

of the line. Stone's religious convictions forbade him to kill, but not to get killed, and he conducted himself accordingly. Ever unmoved, he was seen to cross, without hurrying, areas which were being battered by a hurricane fire. The only effect danger had on his nerves was to make him talkative. I was astounded to hear him call me one day in order to show me his vehicle, the wind-screen of which had just been damaged by shrapnel.

In the meantime he had forgotten the horse. But at the end of a week remorse seized him, and, finding himself at the report centre, he went to see his protégé in the wretched wooden shelter where the mounts of the staff were stabled. Stone's heart was all the more heavy as his horse appeared to him to be skinny.

"It's not my fault," said Baker insolently; "they don't supply us any more with oats."

"All right," said Stone, "I'm going to

have a look for some." It was not his turn to go to the refilling dépôt ; nevertheless, he volunteered, so as to be sure that the horses' food was not forgotten. I met him before he set out to return, and asked him mechanically if the roads were less dangerous than on the preceding days. His recent experiences had made him still more gloomy : he seemed to be wearing mourning for himself !

"I had no difficulty in coming," he answered, with restrained emotion, "but I'm afraid that when I pass a second time it will be very unpleasant."

It was on the morrow that those who were engaged in looking for him discovered him hanging over his steering-wheel in the ditch, by the roadway, with a shrapnel wound in the heart. That is how Stone, the Quaker, died for the sake of a horse.

XXV

AN ENGLISH GENERAL

September, 1915.

TO-DAY the English army possesses many well-tried chiefs, but I doubt if any of them are more endearing than the one about whom I intend to speak.

Although he has spent an already long life in the tropics in giving battle to coloured tribes, or, in their absence, to tigers, trench warfare has no secrets for him. He has now been practising it for a year in the middle of the bogs of Flanders, most often behind the same high road, which, if you please, we will call the "rue du Coucou" and which he, with a sort of despair, would call the "roo doo Coocoo." The days are few and far between when the men of his division, crouching in the first-line trench,

have not to make way for his tall figure. As he passes along he turns his observant face towards each of them—that long, fine face which has never been lined by a single thought unworthy of a gentleman. His ground is as familiar to him as his men. There is not one of the enemy's machine-guns of which he is not aware, and he understands how to dispose his own. He knows thoroughly all the rules of the game.

Whenever the presence of some new German sap, a hundred paces from his wire entanglements, is revealed to him by the appearance of freshly-turned earth, he considers it for a long while in the periscope. The corners of his mouth droop under his small white moustache, and muttering, "The blighters!" he moves away in silence, his lips tightly shut.

Though a good soldier, he is, nevertheless, not without strong opinions of his own. Some months ago the political events of

his country threw him into a state of deep depression. More often than not he confined himself to giving vent to his rage in the letters which he exchanged with his brother, an irritable old sailor, living in retirement in some remote spot in the country. Together they abused the cowardly politicians to their mutual satisfaction. At times, however, the general's anger made its way into his talk, as a general rule at breakfast time, whilst he was eating a boiled egg over the *Times* of the day before. First of all he might be heard uttering some indistinct exclamation. Then, dropping his eye-glass, he would say with disgust : " As for these strikers, the ringleaders ought to be brought out here and put into the most exposed trenches, and there left to be cut to pieces by the Germans. There is no patriotism in the English working man. . . . "

Or again : " You'll see, they won't dare

to propose conscription. They prefer that the pick of the nation should get killed while these rascally cowards walk about at their ease in Hyde Park. . . .”

One morning he actually added : “ After the war, I shall make myself a naturalised Frenchman. Here, at least, is a nation which knows how to fight.”

These fits of Anglophobia are happily only transitory.

His chief weakness is his love of comfort. He is not particular about a bed or a table, but uncleanness makes him suffer cruelly. After a year's campaigning in France, he is not yet reconciled to finding certain conveniences nowhere but in dark, evil-smelling corners, as is still the case in many an honest country dwelling. This primitive side of our civilisation distresses him, and tends to make him have doubts about a national genius for which he professes a profound admiration. His stay in report centres

imposes some hard trials on him in this respect. Whether farm, ramshackle villa, or simple shelter, it is always a spot where you are invaded with mud, and the general would rather be shelled a little more than put up with that. At the sight of a passage where the boots of the connecting files have left tracks of dirt, he is to be overheard sighing deeply.

But small miseries of this sort never spoil the good-naturedness which he shows to everybody. He possesses to the highest degree the English virtue defined by the word "kindness," a sort of manly goodness which is expressed above all in the anxiety not to hurt the feelings of others, and in the willingness to oblige. He makes it his duty to say a kind word to every one. The pleasure he derives from it is so keen that he forgets what the time is. One day he was seen in some dangerous thoroughfare, preferring to risk his life rather than promptly

to take leave of two or three officers who seemed to him worth noticing. But his unalterable good-nature is best seen at his mess. Certain of his table companions, imposed on him by chance, exasperate him, if the truth were known, by their habits, which, after several months of life together, have become intolerable ; but not one of them suspects that he would like to send him to the devil. One of his staff-officers is mad on music. Now, the general has such a profound horror of music that he would cross the Channel in order to escape a concert. Nevertheless, he suffers in silence, and his sole vengeance consists in not coming in to mess before the madman—who generally ushers in dinner with a few chords—has chosen to get up from the piano.

One day, in the course of a battle, under a pretty lively fire, an officer came to bring him some news at his report centre. He found the general in a kind of burrow, which acted as an office, a dining-room and a sleep-

ing-room rolled into one. The gas-flare which lighted up the interior was suddenly extinguished by the shock produced by each crump which exploded in the vicinity. The general looked tired. Large bluish lines under his eyes made him appear ten years older. He and his division had been hurried forward into the middle of the furnace. It was one of those critical moments when it is necessary to cling on to the ground in grim earnest, and without knowing exactly what is in store for you and the thousands of existences for which you are responsible. He related himself the fortunes of the fight in which he had been engaged for several days, squatting down in his dug-out. "I am losing many men," he said sadly. "What will be left of the division when all is over?" At that moment the ground trembled, shaking the general's chair and the table at which the staff secretary was writing.

"This spot," the general continued, "is

the worst that could have been chosen for a report centre. The Germans bombard us from several sides at the same time. This morning, when I went out for an airing, a shell fell twenty paces from me, and alone killed nine horses." He sighed. The losses sustained by his division caused him real pain. In a firm voice he added : " We shall hold out ; I mean to win this battle."

He looked out through the opening in the shelter, and his thoughts seemed completely absorbed by the drama of which he was the centre ; unless it was that he saw over again the bodies without heads and the brains smeared with blood with which the road was strewn the day he had gone to his dug-out.

The officer took leave of the general. The latter, however, unexpectedly detained him, as if a new question of unparalleled importance had suddenly presented itself to him.

“You have, I hope, had lunch?” he asked with solicitude. “Not had lunch! You can’t go like this.” And for some minutes he forgot the battle, while he had a slice of bully beef, a piece of cheddar, and a whisky-and-soda brought for his guest.

XXVI

THE GIANT

November, 1915.

THEY have left France, the Sikhs with their round beards, the Pathans with eyes that look threateningly out under their pointed tiaras, the little Gurkhas like bronze statues, the Punjabi Mussulmans, and the Dogras, also, with their thin moustaches and twisted turbans. With them has also gone, with his well-known indifference, the gigantic and invulnerable Lieutenant-Colonel Hill.

A chance convalescence had given me the opportunity of making his acquaintance at Marseilles, at the beginning of the campaign, when he had just come ashore with his regiment. It was not easy for him to pass unnoticed. Whether he walked about in uniform or in mufti, the population

gathered round him, and you heard them say : "What a tall man that is there !" A little woman exclaimed one day : "There's a man for you at last !"

He didn't turn round. He had been too familiar with this class of exclamation ever since his adventurous existence as a younger son had exposed him in all parts of the world—in China, in the Transvaal, and in the mountains of India—to all the bullets which make for the breasts of Englishmen. He put up with the inconveniences caused by his size in a philosophical way, and restricted himself to saying, from time to time, these words, which were accompanied every now and then by little coughs—

"Don't think " (cough) "that I'm reconciled to it. It's beastly " (cough) "to be so tall."

In the street every normal person assumed the laughable appearance of a dwarf beside him, especially women, who suddenly be-

came little girls. In order to avoid the awnings of shops he had to step off the pavement on to the road—even then he was head and shoulders taller than his tallest companions.

For several days I saw him frequently. Beneath an appearance of indifference, he thoroughly enjoyed the smallest pleasures of existence. At tea, for instance, whatever the quality of the pastry, he would declare all at once: "This set of cakes" (cough) "is the best I've ever tasted."

As an unmarried man, his admiration for the fair sex was only troubled by his fear of ridicule. At moments he would say: "Here's another" (cough) "pretty one." But things went no further than that.

We conversed freely in the course of interminable rambles all over Marseilles. His huge legs felt each day the need of tearing along for miles. We each related our experiences. He described the Colonial

wars he had seen, and in my turn I told him, at his request, about the new enemy he would have to face. Hardened as he was to the atrocities of the Afghans, he was full of restrained anger at the behaviour of the Germans from the moment of their entry into Belgium.

He generally listened without saying a word, his teeth clenched together. On one occasion, however, when we stopped at the top of the Pharo to admire the harbour lined with transports, he coughed (the tropics having left him with an irritation of the throat), and said :

“ Better die than submit to these brutes.”

The most extraordinary thing is that a man of such obtrusive proportions should never have been wounded. He had managed to go through the Boer war without so much as being grazed by a shot. In India he had taken part in the most dangerous expeditions. One year his regiment had

fought in impenetrable jungles in which it was impossible to see two yards in front of you. Here, even when the country had been scoured in every direction, a blow from a lance was waiting for you behind each tuft of tall grasses, and yet Colonel Hill was one of the few officers who came through without a scratch. Another campaign spared him still more disagreeable surprises. For several hours he remained without cover under a fire directed from commanding positions. Lying down by the side of his men, he offered to the mountain tribes, in their entrenchments on the crest of their hills, the most spacious target they had ever discovered in the course of their disreputable existence. The outlines of his huge body were traced, as in some music-hall performance, by hostile bullets, but only one succeeded in making a hole in his cap, and that without touching a hair of his head.

"I've had" (cough) "no luck," he said to me, sincerely regretting his good fortune.

He left for the front. I often thought of him afterwards. I used to wonder how he managed to adapt himself to life in the trenches, especially as even the deepest must have been insufficient to screen him. And it would seem that in the most unimportant attack his fatal size must have made him a special mark for machine-guns. However, his regiment charged many times, and took a glorious part in the victory of Neuve-Chapelle. And when I inquired about his fate I was told that he was still safe and sound. Still a rumour was current a few months ago that he had just been wounded. This time I made arrangements to go and see him. On reaching the farm where he was billeted, I learned from the officers of his regiment that he was on sick leave. I inquired about his wound. "Wounded ?

—ah, yes, he was wounded,” the major said, with a laugh.

This is what they told me. The German bullets had imitated the bullets of the Boers. Whether the colonel was the first to climb on top of the parapet on the day of an attack, or whether he restricted himself to going through the trenches, the bees buzzed harmlessly on all sides of him. Fritz himself, even, the sniper, lying low in front of the English trenches, forgot his cunning. But at last one day the giant was knocked over by a projectile. They ran up to him and found that his tunic was in pieces, but that he himself had escaped with a few bruises. From vexation, the colonel contracted an attack of influenza. Hence his furlough. The major, who imitated him extremely well, added that he had declared in going away : “ This leave ” (cough) “ consoles me for the flue, but not for the shell.”

I feel easy about him now. Germans, Austrians, Bulgarians and Turks, all will continue to miss him. Providence, who has done him a bad turn in making him too tall, has, no doubt, willed that, in compensation, he should be a permanent cause of optical illusions to his enemies.

XXVII

IRONARMS

December 1915.

HE has chubby cheeks and a nice fair moustache. By their gentleness, his blue eyes remind you of those of many a French soldier, officer or private, and you guess they know how to smile at a woman. Not yet completely recovered from his wounds, he limps badly, and so your first impulse is to commiserate him.

However, what is left of Ironarms is still formidable; frequently he invites me to box with him, for his chief weakness is to make a free display of a herculean force unwarranted by what is visible to the naked eye. And it is his delight to hear me cry for mercy. Recently, as he was gaily returning from reconnoitring some trenches, I

learned that, in getting out of the last communication trench, he had fallen in the mud with a leg paralyzed. His self-control defies imagination ; not a muscle of his face betrays sufferings pretty well continuous.

He cannot console himself for having had to leave the regiment in order to become what he calls a "stool-wiper."

"To feel that a lot of brave fellows like you, and place absolute confidence in you—nothing comes up to that, you know. For instance, one day my company was artillery support. . . ."

The telephone interrupts him. It is the divisional quarter-master, who advises him of the arrival of ten sword-bayonet and twelve carbines.

"I was artillery support," resumes Iron-arms, "in a corn-field situated on the reverse slope. A Boche airship comes and hovers over us. Half-an-hour afterwards a volley of crumps falls midway between us and the

battery. That was nothing ; but another volley arrives on the right, and yet another on the left, and from that moment they begin to fall on all sides of us, coming nearer and nearer all the time. I admit that I was not quite easy in my mind. All those who saw us from a distance guessed very well what was going to happen. The group-commander sent word to me to evacuate, if I considered it necessary. The colonel of my regiment, who was looking at me through his glasses, gave me up for dead. But I said to myself : ' I am going to hold on.' I started walking up and down in front of my company. My men were all lying flat on their faces, and their nerves were strained to such an extent that, between the volleys, you could have heard a pin drop. I felt two hundred eyes fixed and riveted on my every movement. Had I shown the slightest sign of fear, all my fellows would have hooked it. Then I lit a

cigarette, which I am not in the habit of doing, and from time to time I said, as calmly as I could, 'Well, boys! They are coming nearer, aren't they?' They didn't budge an inch. And yet splinters began to fly over their heads. It was then that I felt how fond I was of them. All at once I gave the command: 'A hundred yards to the rear.' They obeyed me like one man. Half a minute later the field we had just evacuated was turned over, ploughed up and pounded about. After that I gave another command: 'Everybody in the shell-holes,' and there we were back again at our starting-point. They obeyed me as readily as the first time. I knew what I was doing. I hadn't a single man wounded."

But Ironarms is now summoned by the chief of the staff for the registration of the papers. Ironarms gets up with a sigh:

"Yes," he said, "those were good old times, those."

Nobody is less bloodthirsty than he. Nevertheless, the need to fight and to punch has become instinctive with him. Finding himself, yesterday, in an observation post, he discovers in the distance two German officers' heads showing above the parapet. Whereupon the itch seizes him, and he runs hobbling along to the first-line trench and picks up a rifle. The two Germans were standing with their backs to him. With heart throbbing, but muscles rigid, Ironarms aims at them slowly, at a range of 250 yards, until he gets them at the end of his sight. The shot grazes the top of the parapet at the exact spot at which he had aimed. The two Germans made a dive.

In the evening Ironarms passed alternately from fits of joy to fits of depression.

"I'm sure I hit one of them," he said, "because he fell down quicker than the other. The bullet must have spun in grazing the parapet: that makes a better

wound." The next moment he declared : " It's wretched not being sure about having hit him ! What wouldn't I give to see him lying dead, with his feet in carbolic acid."

Although unmarried, he keeps up a lively correspondence. Every day he receives half-a-dozen letters : some from women, and some from "poilus." He showed me the photo of a youngster, aged twenty, lately wounded at his side, and stretched out on a couch. I could see that he was affected, and, at my request, he read me a passage from the letter which accompanied the photo. The youngster wrote : " Ah, captain, what good luck if I could find myself once more with you, my greatest friend ! If I could brave death again, strengthened by your look ; and if I could die, if need be, holding your hand in mine."

" One of them I shall remember all my life," Ironarms said to me. " I was in Cham-

pagne, when a shell fell on the right flank of my company. I ran to the spot and found one of my men completely smashed up. The poor devil was visibly passing away. I tried to encourage him and give him hope. He answered: 'Captain, I'm done for, I know. I want to tell you something.' So I took him up in my arms; he was going fast, and spoke with difficulty: 'I have a wife . . . and three kids . . . I worship them, and they, too, are very fond of me. . . . So let me kiss you, captain, for them. You'll write them a nice letter, won't you, captain, to tell them that I died bravely . . . thinking of them . . . my wife . . . my kids?' . . . He died in my arms repeating: 'My kids . . . my wife . . . ' I wept," pursued Ironarms: "Death is evidently nothing when you are alone in the world, as I am, but when you are married and have a family . . . !

“By-the-bye, I had a splendid adjutant, also a married man, but that didn't prevent him from fighting like a lion. Some days he spoke of his wife and child and started crying out loud. On such occasions he would say to me, ‘I beg your pardon, captain, I must seem beastly feeble to you.’ Then he lit a big pipe, puffed at it two or three times, and afterwards he was all right.”

The Germans have removed some earth in front of a salient and this very night a patrol is to go and reconnoitre this new work. Ironarms is very distressed. “Ah! lucky dogs,” he repeats to me; “if only I could go with them.” In order to forget the present he takes refuge in his recollections of the past.

“One evening, during the open warfare in the autumn of 1914, when I was with the outposts with my company, I received the order to reconnoitre a village situated about half-a-mile further on, the

other side of a ravine. I made up my mind to proceed there with three men upon whom I could depend, and I said to them: 'Put down your bayonets, and also your ammunition pouches.' I allowed them nothing but their loaded rifles, while I myself kept my revolver only, and we set out like this when it was pitch dark." (He emphasises the promptitude of their departure by extending his right forearm and striking it vigorously with the left hand.) "As we risked finding ourselves every moment face to face with the enemy, we went forward warily. Nothing occurred as far as the ravine. At this spot there was a road to be crossed. Suddenly one of my men catches hold of my wrist and shows me something indistinct the further side of the road. I look—it is a man kneeling and aiming in our direction. Not very amusing, you know. This sentry had certainly heard us. He was not more than ten or fifteen yards from us, and, at the

slightest movement, he would have shot us point-blank, not to mention other Boches who were possibly close at hand, or in the act of manœuvring so as to catch us.

“I remained for several minutes, lying down between my men, to look at this cursed sentinel who persisted in not firing. My heart was beating so loudly that I heard it thumping against the ground. My mind was at last made up. I squeezed the arm of the man on my right and just nodded to him. He understood, hesitated a moment and then began crawling forward. A game chap, that! I wanted him to cross the road a little further on and to outflank the sentinel. He disappeared into the night. These minutes were more trying still than the preceding ones.

“Nothing more was seen of our chap. We were still aiming at each other, we and the Boche, and the wonder was that our rifles did not go off by themselves.

At last, after an eternity, I made out a shadow getting nearer and nearer the Boche. It was probably my 'poilu.' He was also kneeling. At this point it was a real nightmare. We could no longer see which of the two shadows was the enemy sentry and which was the Frenchman. My men were so worked up that I felt they were on the point of firing indiscriminately. At the risk of betraying ourselves, I commanded them imperiously to open the breeches of their rifles. I would have given a leg to know what was going on the other side of the road. But at that moment I heard my brave scout whispering, 'Captain, it's only a bush!'"

Ironarms meditates an instant, and then adds: "In war you are often more afraid of imaginary danger than of real danger."

For several days enemy bullets were striking with mathematical precision a certain battlement which was used by our

look-out men, who were becoming intimidated. As he was passing by, Ironarms gets up on the firing-step, and says to the astonished sentry: "Pass me your rifle." His head and shoulders reach above the parapet, yet he looks quietly out, puts the rifle to his shoulder, discharges it and observes again, like a marksman examining his target, re-loads, and fires a second time. Then he jumps, on one leg, on to the floor of the trench and burst out laughing, whilst the enemy replies with a volley. "In the end you'll get killed for nothing," I tell him on his return. He is in better spirits than usual, and is like a schoolboy after a good practical joke.

"You know, I believe we are marked men," he says, with a laugh; "it does no good to take precautions. If we've got to die, we shall die."

I know now how he won his red ribbon. Last winter, at the time of a great advance,

his battalion received the order to push forward in order to repair the failure of the first two waves of attack. Ironarms commands his men to wait for him. He then sets out alone and reconnoitres a position situated five or six hundred yards further on, quite close to the enemy's line. At nightfall he comes back to fetch his company, leads it to the new position, where it digs itself in as well as it can. Here he holds out twenty-four hours under the hottest of fires, without communication-trench to connect him with the old line, and gives the rest of the regiment time to join him. For nearly a month he lived in that inferno. I jot down fragments of his account :

“On the night of our arrival, we were made to halt in the middle of the communication-trench, and were told to rest for two or three hours. The men crouched down on their knapsacks. For myself, I found a projection to sit on, which, in the

dark, looked like a mile-stone, and I hung my bag on a kind of root. At daybreak I saw that the mile-stone was a frozen corpse, and the root a hand. All along this communication-trench we discovered, in passing, bodies badly buried. Here and there grinning faces leaned out of the wall to look at you. Some of them were so awful that 'poilus' had covered them up with handkerchiefs, which were held in their places by bayonets.

"We spent fifteen days on end in a trench where we were only separated from the Boches by a wall made of sacks of earth. I took two men with me, loaded with bombs, and ran on to this kind of partition; then I threw my bombs the other side of the sacks. We could hear the cries of the Boches; sometimes they replied immediately, and in that case we squashed against the lower part of the partition, and the splinters passed over our heads.

Naturally, I never had any sleep ; now and then I dozed for five minutes, but that was all.

“ One day a shell fell on one of my men who was larking while eating some patties. I rushed on the scene, but found no trace of the ‘poilu.’ In raising my head I saw four yards of intestines, still palpitating, hanging to the branches of the trees which overhung the trenches. These horrible human remains stopped up there several days. It was impossible to unhook them on account of the fusillade. . . . We finally came upon a leg, which we buried in the parapet, and we put the name of the poor devil in a bottle.

“ It was at night especially that you had to hold on to yourself. Hundreds of men, French and Germans, had fallen between the Boche trench and ours, and, the cold having frozen their bodies, many of them remained kneeling or in a crouching

position. By moonlight you would have thought them alive, and in the end you fancied you saw them moving. Sometimes, in going my rounds, I found one of my look-outs with a fixed, haggard look in his eyes. On these occasions I used to give him a good slap to bring him back to himself, and then I used to take his place for a few minutes. At other times I have started off on patrol, and, directly the Boches threw up a star-shell, we used to stand still and hang our heads down, and then they confused us with the corpses. While pretending to be dead, I've sometimes put my hand in something soft and found it to be the stomach of a German. I thought I should never get rid of the stench of it. However, it hasn't prevented me from eating with relish." (And, with a laugh, Ironarms pretends to scoop out a large piece from a loaf of bread.)

“The worst of all was to see the poor wounded who ended by dying between the two trenches. Each night they called to their regiment: ‘Help! the ——th,’ and each night their voices grew feebler. When I heard them call ‘Mamma,’ I knew what that meant, but I’ve never been able to get used to it. I saved one man who had remained for four days on the frozen ground with his two thighs fractured. Fever had prevented him from feeling the cold. To-day his health is better than mine. . . .” Ironarms always ends in the same way: “Well! perhaps you won’t believe me, but all I would ask is to do it all over again.”

He concluded by relating a good part of his life to me, frequently accompanying his recitation with the movements of a fencer. His astonishing rapidity of decision was scarcely any use to him before the war except to get him out of a crowd of tight corners into which the love of adventure

had led him. Under the nickname of *Brin d'Amour* he used to be the terror of married men in certain small garrisons. At Joinville his favourite pleasure was to scour the forest of Vincennes in order to rid it of ruffians. In days gone by he might have been d'Artagnan's favourite companion.

But war satisfies something else in him than the lust of battles. The deep feelings which move him are those which transfigure Republican France to-day : fidelity to the memory of a father who suffered in 1870, anxiety to carry his head high, contempt for vassal peoples, and, more than all those, a love of country equal in fervour to that of a son for his mother or of a lover for his mistress : pagan sentiments, the crudity of which astonishes and scandalises certain pious souls. But these good people forget that thousands of little soldiers have already given their life for this purely human ideal, and that after all the noblest sacrifice of all

is the sacrifice which does not trouble about a reward.

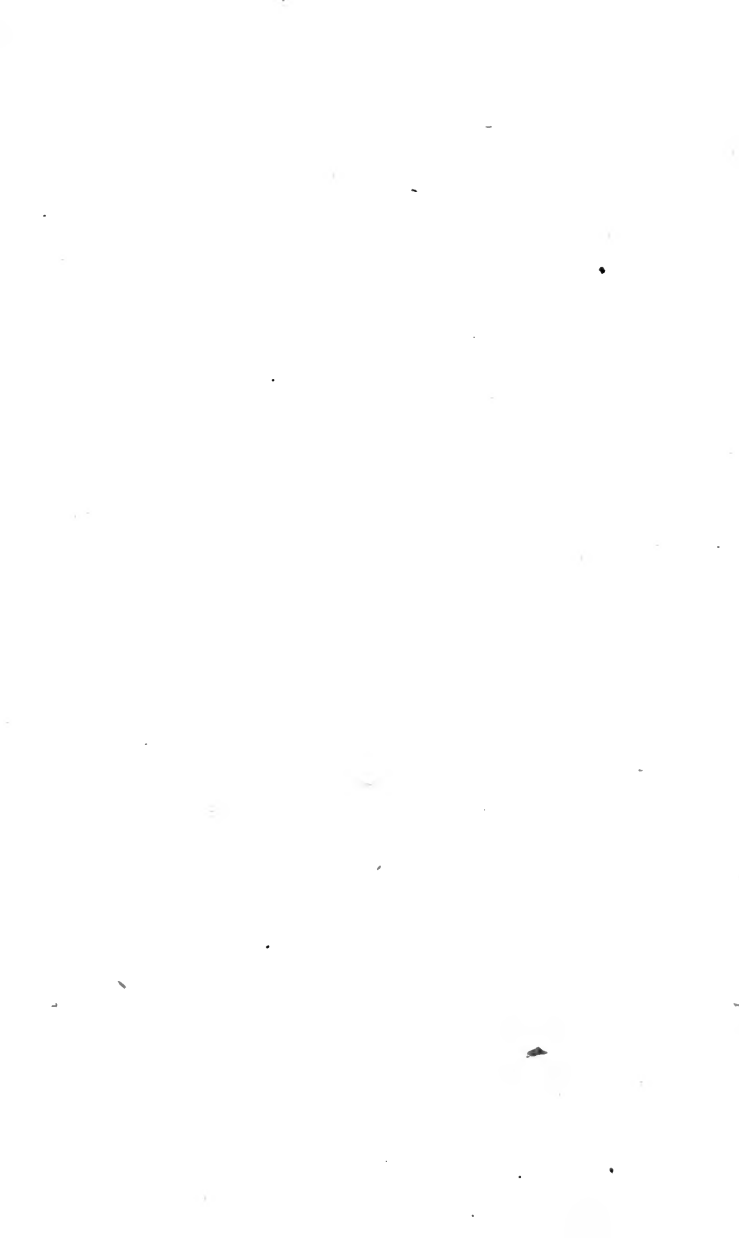
“As my major,” Ironarms said to me, “I had a worthy Breton who was a very devout person. One day before starting to attack I happened to be beside him in the last parallel. We both looked at our watches so as not to miss the time fixed by the commanding officer. We said to one another, ‘Only ten minutes more . . . only six minutes more . . . only four minutes more. . . .’ A few moments before climbing on to the parapet, the major said to me, ‘Say your prayers.’ And there he was making the sign of the cross and mumbling a Paternoster. While he prayed, I chaffed with my ‘poilus,’ who already had one foot on the first step. Having finished his prayer, the major gives the signal of departure, and we leap out of our holes. We fought well that day, and the major better than us all.

“After we had been relieved in the evening, he took me apart. ‘I fancy,’ he said to me, ‘that before the attack you didn’t pray.’ I burst out laughing. ‘Upon my word, major, I confess I don’t make such a fuss each time I have to risk my skin.’ But he did not laugh. He looked at me anxiously, repeating, ‘Really, I don’t understand you.’ At last he said to me, ‘How can you consent to brave Death if you believe that there is nothing more after this life?’ So I answered him, ‘Because I love my country, major. And, in my opinion, it’s a finer thing to die in order to defend one’s country than in order to get to paradise.’ The major did not answer. We remained good friends, but I have often fancied that he thought me a strange animal. My ‘poilus,’ on the contrary, understood me better. When I wished to cheer them up, I never spoke to them of God, but of their wives, their

children, and of France. No more than that is necessary to make them risk their necks."

Ironarm's philosophy is bound up in that statement which he made me the other day, in a voice of command: "I don't care a rap about being killed, but I don't want to poison my life by thinking of it beforehand."

THE END





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